

A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF  
MOUNDVILLE ENGRAVED POTTERY

by  
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A THESIS


Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Anthropology  
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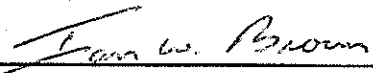
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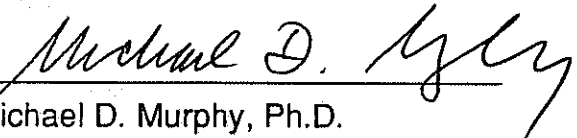
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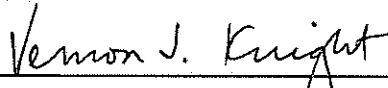
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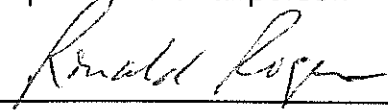
  
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## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Acceptance Page.....   | ii        |
| Acknowledgments.....   | iii       |
| List of Figures.....   | v         |
| Abstract.....  | viii      |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter One</b>   |           |
| Introduction to Moundville Engraved Art in Pottery.....  | 1         |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter Two</b>   |           |
| Previous Discussions of Moundville Engraved Ceramics.....  | 9         |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter Three</b>   |           |
| Database and Image File of Moundville Engraved<br><i>Variety Hemphill</i> Ceramics.....                                | 23        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter Four</b>  |           |
| Themes Found in Moundville Engraved<br><i>Var. Hemphill</i> Ceramics.....  | 36        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter Five</b>  |           |
| Stylistic Analysis.....  | 57        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter Six</b>   |           |
| Definition of <i>Variety Hemphill</i> Style.....   | 65        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter Seven</b>   |           |
| Previous Iconographical Identifications of Moundville Images<br>and Iconography of the Crested Bird at Moundville..... | 79        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter Eight</b>   |           |
| Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research.....   | 89        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Bibliography.....</b>   | <b>90</b> |

## List of Figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1.1 Drawing of <i>Var. Hemphill</i> vessel forms: subglobular bottle, cylindrical bowl, simple bowl, restricted bowl, cylindrical bottle, and narrow neck bottle. After Steponaitis (1983:67)..... | 5  |
| Figure 1.2. Table of the chronology of various Moundville themes. After Steponaitis (1983:129, 80).....   | 7  |
| Figure 3.1. Table of the frequencies of themes from the Hemphill database.....  | 29 |
| Figure 3.2. Vessel SD 805.....  | 30 |
| Figure 3.3. Vessel NE 63.....   | 31 |
| Figure 4.1. Vessel SD 362.....  | 37 |
| Figure 4.2. Full bodied raptor, vessel NE 80, and raptor heads, vessel SD 54.....   | 38 |
| Figure 4.3. Identifying motifs of the Raptor theme.....   | 39 |
| Figure 4.4. "Winged serpent" theme. Vessel NB.....  | 40 |
| Figure 4.5. Vessel NE 596.....  | 41 |
| Figure 4.6. "Trophy" theme. Vessel NR 9.....  | 42 |
| Figure 4.7. Two full body crested birds. Vessel SD 86/M7 and SD 472.....  | 44 |
| Figure 4.8. Representative from "Crested bird" theme which had formerly been considered "Paired tails" theme. Vessel SD 93/M7. From Moore 1907:363.....   | 44 |
| Figure 4.9. Motifs which make up tails of crested birds versus motifs which make up tails of paired tails.....  | 46 |
| Figure 4.10. Example of unknown theme. Sherd M-p 21098.....   | 47 |
| Figure 4.11. Radial fingers theme versus radial fingers motif. Vessel SD 7/M7 and vessel SE 16.....   | 48 |
| Figure 4.12. Vessel NE 145.....   | 50 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 4.13. Vessels NR 99 and NE 63.....   | 51 |
| Figure 4.14. Rattlesnake palette. From C. B. Moore (1905:136).....  | 52 |
| Figure 4.15. Vessel NE 63, SE 16. Radial t-bar as part of snake<br>versus free-floating motif.....  | 53 |
| Figure 4.16. Vessel SD 805.....   | 54 |
| Figure 4.17. Vessel NR 40.....  | 55 |
| Figure 5.1. "Crested bird" and "Paired tails" themes' component motifs<br>and their variations.....   | 59 |
| Figure 5.2. B indicates classification as "Paired tails" theme, R<br>indicates a fancy "Crested bird" theme vessel, Y indicates a plain<br>"Crested bird" theme vessel, and G indicates an intermediate<br>"Crested bird" theme vessel..... | 61 |
| Figure 5.3. Visual representations from the data map.....   | 62 |
| Figure 6.1. Location of Moundville, Walls, Kogers Island, and<br>Pensacola phases, and Hollywood site in the Southeast.<br>After Phillips and Brown (Phillips and Brown 1978).....  | 66 |
| Figure 6.2. Vessel NE 57.....   | 68 |
| Figure 6.3. Walls "Winged serpent" vessel. From Holmes 1886, figure<br>412.....   | 69 |
| Figure 6.4. Walls snakes. From Phillips and Brown, 1978:200,<br>Figure 261.....   | 70 |
| Figure 6.5. Hollywood bowl and Georgia Coastal variant.<br>(Holmes 1903 pl. CXIX.).....   | 72 |
| Figure 6.6. Trophy theme from Kogers Island (above, after Webb and<br>DeJarnette 1942, plate 268), and Moundville vessel<br>SWM 15a/M7 (below, after Moore 1907, figure 46).....  | 74 |
| Figure 6.7. Moundville raptor. Vessel SD 362.....   | 75 |
| Figure 6.8. Two Pensacola raptors, from Holmes (1903: pl. LVII, LXIX).....  | 76 |
| Figure 6.9. Raptor tongue variations. From vessel SD 362 from<br>Moundville, and the Pensacola variation.....   | 77 |
| Figure 7.1. Some of the medallions from the primary crested bird grouping.....  | 84 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 7.2. Wrapped animals from shell cup from Spiro (Phillips and Brown 1984:164, 167)..... | 85 |
| Figure 7.3. Cox style gorget, after Muller (Muller 1989:22).....                              | 86 |

## Chapter One Introduction to Moundville Engraved Art in Pottery

The importance of the Mississippian site of Moundville has been recognized since the middle of the nineteenth century, and an interest in the representational engraved pottery from the site followed. Moundville is located on the Black Warrior River about 25 km south of Tuscaloosa, Alabama and has upwards of twenty platform mounds (Steponaitis 1983:3-6). Occupation began in the Late Woodland, with the West Jefferson phase at around A.D. 900, went through the Moundville I through III phases from A.D. 1050-1550, and ended with the Alabama River phase in about A.D. 1700 (1983:80). Before a discussion of the art from the engraved pottery may proceed, a quick overview of how the pottery itself has been treated throughout the years shall be presented. Although there were excavations and reports on the site of Moundville as early as 1840, careful treatment of the engraved pottery from the site was first undertaken by Clarence Bloomfield Moore in 1905. C. B. Moore was a graduate of Harvard College, and took advantage of the fact that he was independently wealthy to conduct excavations along waterways throughout the Southeast. His techniques surpassed those of most of the professionals of the day, and the fact that he published detailed and lavishly illustrated reports of his excavations made his contribution to Southeastern archaeology all the more valuable (Peebles 1981:78). Especially important to any study of Moundville are his publications in 1905 and 1907 in the *Journal of the Academy of Natural*



*Sciences of Philadelphia*, "Certain Aboriginal Remains of the Black Warrior River" and "Moundville Revisited". He described in detail the materials uncovered by his excavations, and the contexts in which they were found, but also took steps toward analysis of the pottery which was remarkable in both its thoroughness and ability to withstand critical analysis to this day. He described what he termed the incised designs of the Moundville wares, and sought natural prototypes for the representations. Mr. Witmer Stone was the first person to indicate that the representations of crested birds presented to him by C. B. Moore were ivory-billed woodpeckers (Moore 1905:138). Moore also proposed a prehistoric origin for all Moundville artifacts, stressing the absolute absence of historic materials from the site (1905:141).

Moundville representational art from engraved pottery has been included with other Mississippian art within what Waring and Holder (1945) termed the Southern Cult, which will be treated more thoroughly in the following chapter. This term was applied to the motifs found on a number of ceremonial objects. Although Waring and Holder used images from Moundville engraved pottery (1977: 16), engraved pottery as a class was not included with the list of ceremonial objects from which motifs were taken. In fact, the mention of engraved pottery is only included in the designation of Southern Cult motifs by speaking of the motifs "from figures engraved or embossed on the surfaces of these ceremonial objects" (1977:14), and not from the type of pottery it was from. The pottery forms listed by Waring and Holder included painted, bipartite, and tripartite bottles, but there was no mention of engraved bottles. An interesting aside, in light of their singling out of bottles as a Southern Cult hallmark, is that one of the three images used

by Waring and Holder from Moundville engraved pottery (1977:16 fig. 5. e) was one of the few which is not on a bottle at all, but rather an engraved cylindrical bowl currently classified as Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* (Steponaitis 1983:242). The definition of *var. Hemphill*, is in fact predicated on the engraved motifs having at some point been included in the grouping of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex or Southern Cult (1983:58).

Following Waring and Holder, Steve B. Wimberly dealt with the specific Southern Cult manifestations in Moundville pottery. He discovered that all but five of the vessels with Southern Cult motifs were bottles, and that nearly all of them were black filmed engraved, with only a few incised vessels (Wimberly 1960:3). Wimberly asserted that cult pottery vessels were reserved for burial with the dead, based on the relatively high percentage of cult-related vessels in mortuary contexts compared to the paucity of them in midden contexts (1960:5). A cautionary note to the results of this analysis is found as early as Marion L. Dunlevy's paper from the third Southeastern Archaeological Conference, in which she pointed out that many plain sherds are associated with decorated vessels, which makes statistical analysis based on decorated versus undecorated sherds an uncertain undertaking (Dunlevy 1939). In spite of the fact that this was noted prior to Wimberly's report, Wimberly did not seem to take this into account. Also, Wimberly said, "Nearly all ... are black filmed with designs engraved through the film into the gray paste of the vessel" (Wimberly 1960:3), which seemed to indicate that the black film was some sort of coating on the surface of the vessel. C. B. Moore had already provided a reasonably accurate assessment of the black coloration of Moundville pots (Moore 1907:345).

Neither the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex nor the Southern Cult, nor indeed the grouping of Mississippian art as a whole have much stylistic basis for the distinction. The inclusion of engraved art from Moundville pots in this generalized grouping of Mississippian art, the Southern Cult, has instead been based on thematic similarities, and motifs shared by the art from Moundville and that of other Mississippian chiefdoms. The motifs which make up the Southern Cult come from representations in shell, copper, stone, wood, and pottery (Waring and Holder 1977:14), and are included in the Southern Cult for the following reasons:

(a) that each is sufficiently specialized as to preclude casual delineation, (b) that each, from its appearance in association with other motifs and elements of the complex, is unquestionably part of the complex, and (c) that each carried sufficient ceremonial significance to be used alone on cult objects (1977:9).

These similarities of theme and content which are found in many different media from geographically distant areas, rather than showing a deep connection between various Mississippian chiefdoms, serve to obscure differences of representation between them. Stylistic analysis of Moundville engraved art on pottery seems to indicate that there is a Moundville style which is distinct from that of any of the engraved art in pottery from other Mississippian chiefdoms with which it is so frequently compared.

Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* art is found on a number of vessel types, although the subglobular bottle with simple, slab, and pedestal base is in the overwhelming majority. Other vessel forms that occur with *var. Hemphill* decoration in much lower quantities, often a single vessel, are cylindrical bowls, simple bowls, restricted bowls, cylindrical bottles, and narrow neck bottles (Steponaitis 1983:317).

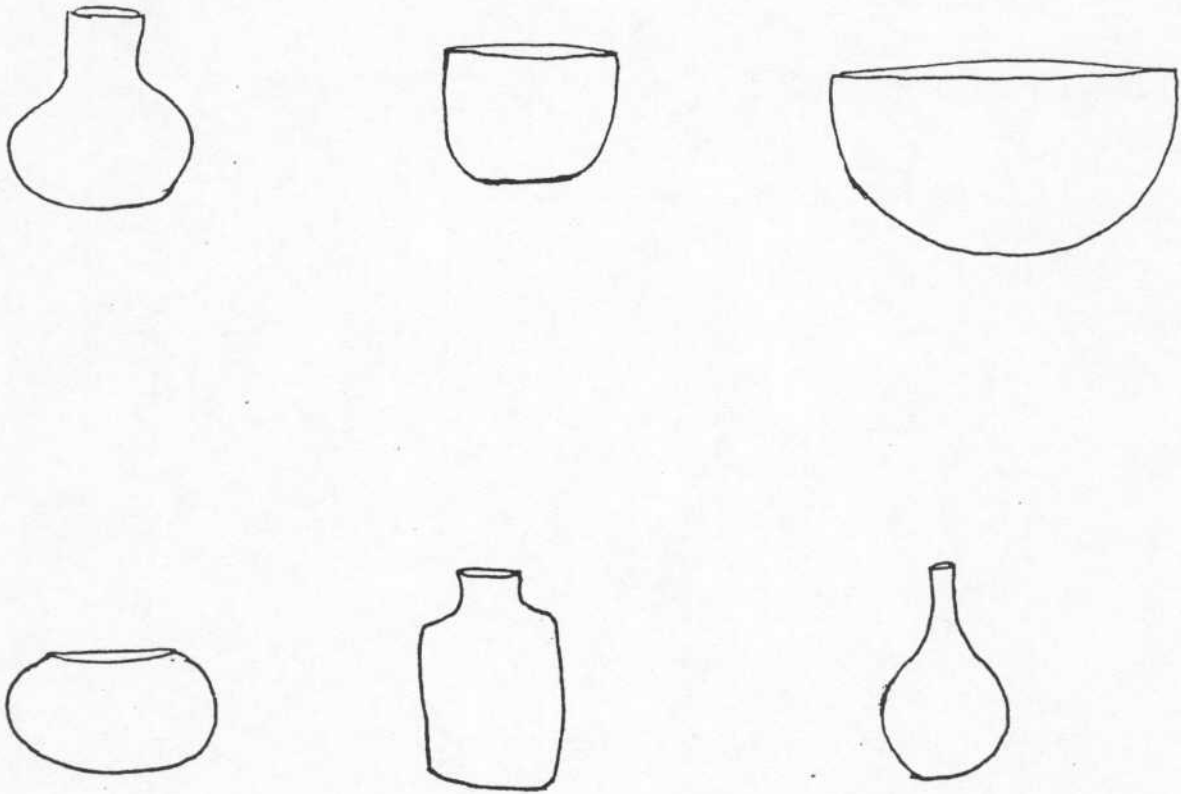


Figure 1.1. Drawing of *var. Hemphill* vessel forms: subglobular bottle, cylindrical bowl, simple bowl, restricted bowl, cylindrical bottle, and narrow neck bottle. After Steponaitis (1983:67).

*Var. Hemphill* vessels are considered service ware, and are shell tempered. With the exception of one white-slipped engraved sherd, the surface of the *var. Hemphill* pots are what was originally termed black-filmed. C. B. Moore stated,

the Moundville ware, except in the case of cooking-vessels, is almost invariably covered with a coating of black, more or less highly polished on the outer surface. This coating

was not produced by the heat in firing the clay, but was a mixture intentionally put on by the potters (Moore 1905:140).

Moore gave samples of the black surface to Harry F. Keller, who determined the coating to be a carbonaceous material, of perhaps bituminous substance (1905:140). Moore himself rectified this assessment in his next publication about Moundville, after reading the account by Holmes of Catawba pottery making. Holmes identified not only the nature of the firing which produced the black color, but also that use of this particular firing method was a controlled choice deliberately used to produce this effect (Holmes 1886:373). As Moore stated, "The vessel, surrounded by bark, is covered by an inverted receptacle during the firing process" (Moore 1907:345). The explanation of this smudging and reduction firing technique is further refined by Steponaitis (Steponaitis 1983:24-25).

Steponaitis worked on establishing a chronology of Moundville pottery based on whole vessels in curation and on sherds from the 1978-1979 excavations at Moundville conducted by Margaret Scarry from the University of Michigan (Steponaitis 1983: xix-xx). Gravelot seriation is one of the primary means used to establish this chronology (1983:79). As a large number of the extant Moundville engraved pots were recovered by C. B. Moore well before radiocarbon dating was discovered (1983:6-7), the precise dating of much of the corpus of Moundville art is unknown. However, Steponaitis (1983:80) used gravelot seriation to establish a ceramic chronology for most of the representational art on a theme-by-theme basis (Figure 1.2).

|                | <b>Moundville II</b><br>(A.D. 1250-1400) |         | <b>Moundville III</b><br>(A.D. 1400-1550) |       |
|----------------|--|---------|---|-------|
|                | Early                                    | Late    | Early                                     | Late  |
| Bilobed arrow  | -----                                    | -----   |   |       |
| Crested bird   |  |         | -----                                     |       |
| Feather        | -----                                    |         | -----                                     |       |
| Forearm bones  |  |         |   | ----- |
| Greek cross    | -----                                    |         | -----                                     |       |
| Hand and eye   | - - - -                                  | -----   | -----                                     |       |
| Paired tails   |  | -----   | -----                                     |       |
| Radial fingers | - - - -                                  | -----   | -----                                     |       |
| Raptor         | - - - -                                  | -----   | -----                                     |       |
| Scalp          |  | - - - - | -----                                     |       |
| Skull          |  |         | -----                                     |       |
| Winged serpent |  |         | -----                                     |       |

Figure 1.2. Table of the chronology of various Moundville themes. After Steponaitis (1983:129, 80). Key: -----, present; ----, very likely present; - - - -, possibly present or very likely present in greatly reduced frequency.

Steponaitis's gravelot seriation helps to tie chronology to variations of style in Moundville Engraved pottery. Stylistic analysis may also be used to approach answers to chronological questions and other problems. The goal of this thesis is not only to apply stylistic analysis to problems such as the definition of Moundville style, the identification of Moundville themes, and iconography of Moundville imagery, but also to help to establish methods which may effectively be used for stylistic analysis of art from other Mississippian sites. The establishment of a database and image file of Moundville engraved art will provide material for future research, stylistic or otherwise. Before the discussion of this stylistic analysis, it is important to

have a brief overview of how stylistic analysis of Mississippian art, especially Moundville art, has been conducted in the past.

## Chapter Two Previous Discussions of Moundville Engraved Ceramics

In order to understand the implications and limitations of this study of Moundville engraved art on pottery, a discussion of previous relevant research is in order. There are three areas of prior study which affect this current research: (a) generalized art history pertaining to archaeological artifacts, with specific focus on analysis of Mississippian art; (b) generalized social, political, and artistic forms found within chiefdom level societies, with specific focus on Mississippian chiefdoms; and (c) studies of Moundville, with particular emphasis on prior studies of Moundville art.

Analysis of prehistoric art must be somewhat different in nature than that of historic art for obvious reasons. Part of the problematic nature of the study is not having direct ethnographic information of how the art was used within the society, who controlled its production and distribution, and what meanings were attached to certain representations. Franz Boas, an anthropologist, and Erwin Panofsky, an art historian, both recognized one of the most important concepts used in prehistoric iconography, that which we shall term disjunction. Disjunction refers to the tendency of a form to be associated with variable meanings (and a meaning to be associated with variable forms) through time and geographical distance (Boas 1955:128; Panofsky 1972a:18-19). Boas identified this concept in 1927, saying "The same form may be given different meanings . . . not only tribally but also individually" (Boas 1955:128). Panofsky's example of this was the use



during the Renaissance of pagan images to embody Christian ideas and the use of Christian images to embody pagan ideas (Panofsky 1972:18-19). An understanding of how this concept affects the study of prehistoric art is tied to one of the basic means of interpreting archaeological art, the use of ethnographic analogy.

The idea of ethnographic analogy goes through cycles of popularity and disfavor, but there is overwhelming support for establishing an understanding of the particular culture which formed the art. In Mesoamerican prehistoric art, a strong reliance on the historic and modern Maya has greatly aided the understanding of Classic Maya art (Schele and Freidel 1990:20-30). The problem of Southeastern prehistoric art is that the descendants of the Mississippian cultures, the historic Southeastern Indians, underwent drastic changes in their cultures from prehistoric times to the present. These changes include massive population depletion and movement, a change from a chiefdom-level society to loose confederacies of tribes, and ongoing assimilation to European culture (Hudson 1976:427-451). Some researchers, such as James Howard, have asserted that the religion of the American Indians is highly conservative (Howard 1968:14). Howard used Christian analogy to demonstrate that a single religion can have regional variations in its artistic representations that obscure the fact that it is one religion (Howard 1968:12). To prove that this analogy is applicable to the Mississippian Southeast would require more supporting evidence and analysis than he provided. Since we do not know for certain what kind of symbolic importance could have been placed upon

Mississippian art, ethnographic analogy is likely the only clue to that understanding which is available.

Disjunction and the uncertainty of the rate of change in form and meaning make ethnographic analogy suspect, but comparison to living or historic cultures is still the best hope we have of finding meaning in prehistoric art. Willey (1973) argues that the stylistic disjunction in art mirrors disjunctions in other aspects of culture. This establishes a kind of punctuated equilibrium view of the evolution of art styles. This would make disjunction more predictable and ethnographic analogy more valid. As it is sometimes the only clue to conventional meanings in art we have, we must learn to use ethnographic analogy judiciously and maximize its relevance to the culture in question as much as possible.

One of the approaches to study of prehistoric art which has had great success in Mesoamerica is stylistic analysis. It has been used to establish regional and chronological variations of style, especially regarding Classic Maya public art. In 1950, Tatiana Proskouriakoff connected the stylistic shifts that resulted from change through time with changes in manner of depiction of motifs rather than changes in the motifs depicted. While the initial goal of the study was to identify which motifs were indicative of different styles, it was found that the style of the rendering of the motifs themselves was more productive in making the stylistic distinctions which allowed for chronological seriation based on style (Proskouriakoff 1950:2-3). Proskouriakoff was hailed as one of the greatest contributors to knowledge about the Maya, owing to her ability to carefully and systematically break down the incredibly complicated Maya themes into their component motifs, and analyze the

subtle changes which marked stylistic variation through time and geographic distance (Schele and Freidel 1990:48). Proskouriakoff also demonstrated awareness of the limitations of stylistic analysis of prehistoric art in regard to attempting to divine meaning from analysis of the motifs, for "Without a better understanding of Maya symbolism than we now have, it is difficult to classify, much more to interpret, the motifs portrayed, and there is no general agreement as to whether the figure represents a deity, a priest or ruler, or an abstract conception symbolically portrayed" (Proskouriakoff 1950:4). Her work with prehistoric art established a disciplined approach to stylistic analysis which was followed by many art historians, epigraphers, and archaeologists alike. Even as the Maya glyphs become better understood, there are still many Late Pre-Classic or Proto-Classic stelae, such as the Izapan-style sculptures from the Chiapas-Guatemala highland and Pacific slope of Mexico and Guatemala (Quirarte 1973:5), which do not include a date in the glyphs. Therefore, the establishment of a chronological sequence must here, too, be made on the basis of stylistic analysis. Jacinto Quirarte, in his analysis of Izapan-style art, gave not only an excellent methodological example of the practice of stylistic analysis, but also a brief yet important background of the theory involved (Quirarte 1973:7-9). In general, he used analysis of themes, larger units of form made up by motifs, to understand changing styles. However, it should be noted that analysis of themes is based on breaking them down into their component motifs and analyzing the changes in them, much as Proskouriakoff did, although she did not use this terminology (Proskouriakoff 1950).

Having outlined certain approaches to the study of prehistoric art, our focus now shifts to the methods used by some of the people who have tackled the analysis of Mississippian art. In 1945, Antonio Waring and Preston Holder wrote an article in the *American Anthropologist* which has affected every single work on the analysis of Mississippian art from that day to this (Waring and Holder 1945). Although the designation "Southeastern Ceremonial Complex" or "Southern Cult" as used to refer to the varied body of fine art made during the Mississippian stage has lately been challenged or restricted, and the trait list of the art itself been changed or discarded (Brown 1976; Muller 1989; Brose 1989), the impact of this article was enormous. On the one hand this article was valuable as a tabulation of Mississippian materials, which could be consulted for comparative work, and on the other hand, it dealt with the potential cultural background of such an artistic system (Waring and Holder 1977: 23, 29). Waring and Holder discarded earlier notions of direct Mesoamerican influence in the guise of transmission of Mesoamerican cults through direct contact (either artifactual or personal), in favor of the idea of the generalized diffusion of Mesoamerican cults through cross-cultural sharing from one group to another. They thought that the North American version of the cult complex was refined somewhere in the Middle Mississippi Basin and spread throughout the Southeast, and associated it with the spread of horticulture (Waring and Holder 1977:29). Waring and Holder associated the Mississippian artifacts included in the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex with indirect Mesoamerican influence on the one hand, and more directly with historic Southeastern Indian groups such as the Creek, Natchez, and Chickasaw on the other (1977:27).

James H. Howard contributed to the study of Southeastern prehistoric art by drawing parallels between Mississippian art and its historic counterparts in Southeastern Indian culture (Howard 1968). Howard based much of this work on Waring's *The Southern Cult and Muskhogean Ceremonial* (Waring 1977), and combined historic accounts from William Bartram and John R. Swanton with Howard's own ethnohistoric research on the Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Natchez, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Alibamu, Koasati, and Caddo (Howard 1968:2). Howard criticized the separation of archaeological analysis from historical study, preferring instead to use historic accounts to explain prehistoric art. He claimed that there is "essential conservatism of American Indian culture, especially in religious matters" (1968:14). Without seeking to contradict him entirely, it should be mentioned that the principle of disjunction, discussed above, allows for an artistic theme to embody completely different conventional meanings at different times. Therefore the identification of prehistoric themes (or motifs, as he terms them) by relation to historic myths and language should be treated with the utmost caution as it is impossible to tell what may have changed in the centuries between production of the art and the historic people who provided the potential interpretation for it. Howard tied the motifs tabulated by Waring and Holder directly to myths and ceremonies of historic Southeastern Indians. This approach contrasts sharply with that of Proskouriakoff, whose careful analysis of minute stylistic variation did not attempt to interpret symbolism in the absence of firm knowledge about the use of symbolism of the people who made the art. Howard made assertions which are questionable at best, one of which was that "Mesoamerica is the source of many Mississippian

features" (1968:8), although he did not list a single feature as evidence. Another suggestion he made, that the complex of materials which were associated with the "Southern Cult" represented some kind of revitalization movement *and* the "principal or state religion of the group" (1968:12), is equally suspect. The presence of a state religion outside of a state-level society would be a truly curious phenomenon, one which even the vast and fascinating body of Mississippian art could hardly support.

In the book *Precolumbian Shell Engravings from the Craig Mound at Spiro, Oklahoma* (Phillips and Brown 1978), the archaeological context of the art has a role in the stylistic analysis. Phillips and Brown were interested in understanding the stylistic relationship of themes and their component motifs, and how they could be grouped together in "style assemblages" (1978:105). They continually stressed that they were less interested in iconography in the strict sense, i.e., the understanding of meaning in art, than in what may be learned by the stylistic groupings within the materials from a particular site as well as between sites (1978:103-106, 163-168). Phillips and Brown were most interested in themes and their stylistic relations to one another, and they showed how themes and their component motifs may give insight into the association between form and iconographic meaning (1978:104).

Phillips and Brown briefly and periodically spoke of Mesoamerican connections to certain themes in Mississippian art (1978:130-131), but did not go into detail about precisely what the nature of those connections might be on anything other than on a stylistic basis. In the same way that they sidestepped the issue of conventional meaning by sticking primarily to

stylistic analysis, they also avoided the mire of the question of Mesoamerican influence by remarking on stylistic similarities without proposing direct contact between Mississippian and Mesoamerican cultures.

An understanding of the role of the artist within a stratified, agricultural society in the Americas brings together the study of art with the study of prehistoric culture (Phillips and Brown 1978:103), and includes the application of ethnographic analogy. Stratified societies have certain characteristics which set them apart from egalitarian societies. Early stratified societies such as chiefdoms are also distinct from states in how art and religion are tied to the maintenance of the social organization. Mary Helms was concerned with how ethnohistorical accounts may be used to show how art could be used by chiefs to legitimize their authority through the physical manifestation of the ties between the chiefs and their ancestors in the spirit world (Helms 1987). One of the most important identifications Helms made was the definition of the link between art and elite qualities "in terms of types of items manufactured, in terms of the medium used, and in terms of the treatment accorded the medium" (1987:69). These same factors were at work in the Mississippian Southeast in regard to goods associated with elites. Helms further sought to identify specialized representations which fit the preceding criteria, and found the motifs which formed these representations to be "associated with the diverse expressions and expectations of chiefship" (1987:75). Although students of Southeastern prehistoric art do not have the kind of ethnohistorical accounts which Helms does for Central America or the Antilles, the similarities of criteria for Mississippian art seem to indicate that a similar connection between art and

ideology is at work. Without knowing anything whatsoever about the particular cosmological significance of the representational art, we may nonetheless conclude with some certainty that the art possessed a profound sociological significance. The distinction between chiefdom and state levels of social organization relevant to this discussion is the way in which power is held by the elite. In state level societies, the class system and government control, including the possibility of military action, serve to separate elites from commoners. In contrast, chiefs have to strike a balance between separation and involvement between themselves (and the elite group as a whole) and the commoners. The strength of kinship means that chiefs cannot rely on secular control over the masses, so they turn to control of esoteric knowledge and connection to the spirit world. As Helms states,

To be effective as political-religious leaders they must be active and in an atmosphere of rivalry make visible to other contending elites and to the general populace their skills and activities as leaders in (external) warfare, as specialists in long-distance exchange, as experts in communication with the cosmic powers that must be understood and controlled for the proper functioning of society (1987:77).

With this generalized, yet extremely applicable identification of what a chief needs to do to maintain power, and how that may be accomplished through art, we may gain insight into how Moundville chiefs may have used similar means to reach similar ends.

An understanding of the complexities involved with study of Mississippian art encompasses knowledge of prehistoric religion, economy, and exchange systems (Muller 1989:11). Jon Muller, through his identifications of the many style horizons and many of the regional styles of Mississippian art, has cracked the foundation of the monolithic "Southern



Cult" designation (1989). Although Muller has authored many articles which focus on the particular means and ends of stylistic analysis of certain Mississippian art (Muller 1966, 1977, 1986), his article entitled "The Southern Cult" deals with all the major points which he reiterates throughout his prolific works. The three most important points of this article all support the assertion that the so-called "Southeastern Ceremonial Complex" is not a complex at all. Muller presented these arguments: (a) some of the motifs which define this Mississippian phenomenon are also found in Middle Woodland art (1989:13); (b) there are various chronological distinctions in style which divide the so-called complex (1989:13-18); and (c) there are clear regional style distinctions which undermine the solidity of the "complex" designation (1989: 18-19). Muller suggested that the explanation of the similarities in art during the Mississippian stage are more neatly explained by underlying cultural similarity than by an overarching Cult complex which was adopted wholesale by different Mississippian groups (1989:19). Having dealt briefly with Mississippian art and chiefdoms in general, it is now time to turn attention to Moundville itself.

Moundville is one of the most important Mississippian mound centers in the Southeastern United States. In terms of Mississippian art found at the site, it is in the class of Spiro, Oklahoma and Etowah, Georgia. Excavations at Moundville have gone on from the 1840s, when Thomas Maxwell first described and excavated at the site, to the present (Peebles 1981:78). Maxwell, a natural historian, observed and recorded information about Moundville, and proposed connections between Moundville and Aztec culture. This type of association was quite common at the time, and Maxwell

was just following the ideas of the day (1981:78). In the years between 1840 and 1869, artifacts and skeletons were uncovered, although no records of excavation exist. Nathaniel T. Lupton was the first to systematically excavate at Moundville, and made a completely accurate map of the site. His notes were excellent, and his excavation heralded the beginning of "sponsored research" at the site. For his invaluable services and professional excavation he received \$29.85 (1981:78). From that time to the excavation by C. B. Moore in 1905, no good records were made of excavation, although James D. Middleton acquired a number of artifacts for the Smithsonian Institution. When Clarence Bloomfield Moore, a wealthy graduate of Harvard College, excavated at Moundville in 1905, he brought methods ahead of his time. He not only kept copious notes, and carefully oversaw the excavation, but also catalogued burials and their associated artifacts together and published well written and lavishly illustrated documents of his excavation in 1905 and 1907 (Peebles 1981:79, Moore 1905, 1907). Beginning in 1932, David L. DeJarnette, trained by the University of Chicago field school in archaeology, took over direction of the excavations at Moundville. This heralded a new age of Moundville archaeology, one where collection of information took precedence over collection of artifacts. According to Peebles, DeJarnette and Wimberly first defined the "Moundville Culture" in 1941 (Peebles 1981:80), but it was not until Douglas H. McKenzie's thesis in 1964 that the Moundville phase was defined on the basis of pottery, stone, and other traits (McKenzie 1964:284-287). McKenzie's definition has been modified through the years to encompass the complexities which continue to come to light through increasingly refined analysis (Steponaitis 1983). Steponaitis's

current type-variety classification of Moundville pottery is based on concepts defined by Phillips. Moundville Engraved is broken down into twelve varieties, based on the engraved design (1983:54-56). *Variety Hemphill* is the one with which this analysis of Moundville art is concerned, as it contains the zoomorphic representations, as well as other themes which seem to have conventional meaning. Now that a brief history of the archaeology of Moundville has been presented, we may turn to the prior research done specifically regarding the engraved art in pottery of the site.

Mississippian art at Moundville has been the subject of a fair amount of interest, from C. B. Moore's works in the first decade of the twentieth century (Moore 1905, 1907), through Waring and Holder's trait-list approach (Waring and Holder 1945), to Steponaitis's clarification of the distinctions of Moundville Engraved *var. Hemphill* from other Moundville ceramics (Steponaitis 1983). C. B. Moore was interested in the representations of the engraved ceramics, providing precise drawings of the engraved images and excellent photographs of many pots. He sought natural prototypes for the engraved images, consulting naturalists for more accurate identifications (Moore 1905:183). Moore did not particularly try to analyze Moundville ceramics as a body of art, but his copious records and illustrations allowed others to attempt that task. Waring and Holder took representations from copper, shell, ceramics, and stone from Moundville and other major sites throughout the Southeast to devise their trait list for what they termed the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (Waring and Holder 1977:23). Waring and Holder took both ornamentation and representation to be part of the so-called Southern Cult, and readily compared physical objects to their

representations in engraved shell and repoussé copper (1977:21). They adopted some of C. B. Moore's terms for representations, such as hand and eye, and woodpecker, but subsumed others under the rubric "god-animal representations". Waring and Holder only treated Moundville engraved pottery as one part of a Southeastern artistic complex. Steve B. Wimberly took Waring and Holder's trait list and applied it directly to Moundville ceramics, making a list of the "cult manifestations" at Moundville (Wimberly 1960:1-3). McKenzie's thesis on Moundville also included a section on the presence of Waring and Holder's Southeastern Ceremonial Complex at Moundville. He followed Wimberly in applying Waring and Holder's trait list directly to Moundville art. He did make some insightful observations about how motifs related to one another at Moundville, and identified the presence of the hand and eye motif in conjunction with other motifs, such as the death head, which indicated it should be included as a "death motif" (McKenzie 1964:182). Moundville engraved ceramic art has most commonly been treated as a part of a greater Mississippian artistic complex, or in relation to the art of other sites and other media. Phillips and Brown have an entire section of their work on Spiro shell engraving devoted to comparing Spiroan engraved shell with Moundville engraved art on both shell and pottery. They connect Moundville with the Braden style at Spiro, particularly with Braden B (Phillips and Brown 1978:195). Phillips and Brown discuss the problems of comparing representations from different media, which carry with them different problems relating to use of images on different design fields (1978:197). They are concerned not only with the stylistic differences, but also with the iconographic representations of both sites, from the relative

limitations of the Moundville bestiary to the prolific use of death motifs such as skulls and bones at the site. The most interesting conclusion they reached was that the "iconographic parameters of ... Moundville pottery are of comparable, or even lesser, dimensions than those of a single style phase in the engraved shell of Spiro," and indicate that if the reasons for this were understood, that much more could be known about the sociological implications of the art of both sites (1978:198).

It is my belief that the most effective way of doing comparative analysis of art is to first conduct stylistic analysis of the art from one site, then to compare it to stylistic analysis of art in the *same medium* of another site. In other words, engraved ceramics should be compared first and foremost with other engraved ceramics, not shell or copper or anything else. The stylistic analysis of each medium and each site should be carried out individually, placed in chronological context, and only then compared stylistically to artifacts from another site, medium, or time. The next chapter is concerned with exactly how this stylistic analysis may be carried out in a productive manner.

### Chapter Three

#### Database and Image File of Moundville Engraved *Variety Hemphill* Ceramics

The last chapter presented some of the various methods which have been applied to the study of prehistoric art. By following those studies which seemed to me to be the most sound in theory and productive of results, the methods for this study were established. This chapter is concerned with the presentation of those methods and how the images were gathered and catalogued for study.

The primary sources used for the collection of data regarding Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* ceramics were the indexes compiled by Vincas P. Steponaitis for his book *Ceramics, Chronology and Community Patterns* (1983) and the Alabama Museum of Natural History accession files maintained at Moundville. All Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* vessels and sherds which were recorded by Steponaitis were used as the base list for images to be put in the image file. This list was then matched to the accession listings of objects curated at Moundville Archaeological Park (MAP) in order to obtain accession numbers and locations for all of the *var. Hemphill* vessels. These were recorded in a database using Paradox, which will be discussed in greater detail on page 25. The *var. Hemphill* index compiled by Steponaitis included vessels curated at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in New York. This NMAI collection is a majority of the material collected by C. B. Moore from Moundville. While extant

photos and drawings of the NMAI collection of Hemphill vessels were used in the image file, those few images from that collection which were not already photographed or drawn were left out of the file altogether.

The vessels included in the index by Steponaitis were those which were curated and available at the time of his study. Not all pots which had images and information available were included in this index, as Steponaitis did not analyze pots which were unavailable for direct study. There were two sources of images of *var. Hemphill* pots that were used for this study when the pots themselves were not available for study. These were the Alabama Museum of Natural History (AMNH) photograph files, and Fundaburke and Foreman's *Sun Circles and Human Hands* (1957).

Not all of the extant images of Moundville engraved pots had information about where at Moundville they were found and in what context. C. B. Moore was the first at Moundville to record burials together with their associated artifacts (Moore 1905, 1907). Moore also provided provenience information for all the vessels from his excavation he illustrated in his text, for example his figure caption given as "Vessel No. 15a. Ridge North of Mound R" (Moore 1905:228, Fig. 150). This was the basis of the catalogue numbers which were later used for the materials. Unfortunately, one of the most spectacular crested bird pots from Moundville was in the University of Alabama museum without any more information than that it had been found at Moundville (1905:137). This was one of the few illustrations in either of Moore's works on Moundville which does not have indications of its provenience. The Alabama Museum of Natural History has catalogue numbers on both the photographs and in a negative index file,

where information about each image is recorded. Photos generally have the original catalog numbers, but in some cases the negative numbers in the index file do not match the negatives or photographs in the storage file. Fundaburke and Foreman's book provided drawings of vessels which have no other representation in any published source, but they did not provide catalog numbers or provenience information for any of the drawings.

The final source of *var. Hemphill* images recorded in the image file was from recent excavations, temporarily kept at Ten Hoor Hall at the University of Alabama. These were mostly sherds, although one nearly complete vessel depicting a winged serpent was included. Any sherd which had a large enough engraved area to be able to make a theme identification for the sherd was drawn and included in the image file and database as well. Some sherds had a large enough engraved area to see that they represented a theme which is otherwise absent from pottery at Moundville, and they were classed either as unknown or phantasmagoria (see themes, chapter four).

The Paradox database is the full index of the image file of all known drawings and photographs of *var. Hemphill* pots. The database is arranged by document number, which is the number of the file folder which contains all images of each vessel. Information on the image file is kept in two distinct databases, one entitled "Hemphill" and the other entitled "Images". The Hemphill database includes the original catalog number, the current accession number (from MAP or NMAI), the document number, the current location of the vessel, an indication of whether there are images in the file or not, whether the object is a full vessel or a fragment, the provenience of the



object, the burial number (if it was associated with a burial), and the theme of the image. The Images database is concerned with information about the images in the file, and includes the drawing/photo number (based on the document number), the document number, the image suffix, whether it is a photograph or drawing, if it is an Alabama Museum of Natural History photo, the Alabama Museum of Natural History negative number, if it is a Steponaitis photo, if it is a Moore photo, the Moore photo reference, if it is a photo from another source, photo comments, if it is a drawing from Moore, Moore drawing reference, if it is a Fundaburke drawing, Fundaburke drawing reference, if it is a Lacefield drawing, drawing date, if it is a drawing from another source, and drawing comments.

Potential confusion may arise regarding the lack of accession numbers for some of the objects in the database and misleading accession numbers for others. The first problem is both simple and unavoidable. Some of the objects were not accessioned, either because they were missing at the time of accessioning, or because they had not yet been accessioned at the time the database was established. The other problem was a little trickier. Vessels with WP' provenience were mistakenly accessioned together with the WP collection in the ongoing accessioning of Moundville artifacts. This is a more significant confusion that at first appears, as WP' is an area just west of the present museum, while WP designates a location west of mound P at Moundville. Although only about a hundred yards apart, these areas are by no means the same. The location and accession numbers of WP' do not distinguish the difference in provenience of these two distinct locations.

In general, the accession number for the provenience is used in the database (e.g., SWG is 1934.4 in the database, rather than SWG 53 being 1934.4.2345 or whatever it might be), meaning that the specific object in question may or may not have been accessioned individually. The result of this method of finding accession numbers is that although the location for the objects in the same provenience is known, the specific object in question may or may not be there. If the object is not curated with others from the same provenience, this means either: (a) it is curated in special collections; (b) it is out on loan; or (c) it is among the ranks of the missing pots. Steps were taken to identify the category to which each vessel belonged. A full account of the Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* vessels curated at Moundville Archaeological Park in special collections was made, and the specific accession numbers matched with each vessel there. This was accomplished by going through all of the special collections and looking at all of the Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* pots. This also ensured that there were no significant engraved images which were not recorded for inclusion in the image file. Those pots which were out on loan at the time of the collection of data had records of which vessel was loaned to whom at what time, and what the theme of the engraving was if it was representational. Into the final, "missing" category fell those pots which were included in Steponaitis's inventory (Steponaitis 1983:231-265), but were not specifically accessioned in the later inventory.

The missing category merits a bit of discussion at this point, as it must be emphasized that every effort was made to find these pots, or at least to follow the paper trail as far back as it would lead. There was a massive theft

of pots from Moundville curation shortly after Steponaitis completed his inventory. The FBI used Steponaitis's inventory to help identify which pots were taken in the robbery. Various speculations have placed the stolen pots in other countries, or in storage, waiting for a time when the pressure is off to be sold, or at the bottom of the Black Warrior River, dumped by the thieves who became aware of the FBI handling of the case. To this day, no one knows where the pots are. The FBI compiled a list of officially missing Moundville pots as part of their investigation. Along with this list were photographs of the missing pots (where available). Some of the photographs of pots which were included in this group were not listed as officially missing; others were pots which are currently curated at Moundville. The FBI list of the catalog numbers of missing pots appears to be accurate, if not entirely complete. As previously stated, there were some pots which were unable to be located at the time the images were being collected. The location recorded in the database for any currently unlocatable vessel was "unknown", and if it was on the FBI list, that fact was noted. Finally, if a vessel was unaccessioned, but curated somewhere at the MAP other than the special collections, the location was recorded as "DeJarnette curation."

Not all of the vessels included in the database are curated at Moundville. The two other locations where significant numbers of vessels or fragments of Moundville Engraved pots are kept are at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York and at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alabama. These locations are recorded in the database as well. A very few locations are given as "not at NMAI", an admittedly confusing way of distinguishing location. This is used for vessels which were

described by Moore (1905, 1907), but are not currently in the NMAI collection.

Another important part of the database is the identification of themes of the images in the file. Thorough discussion of themes of Moundville Engraved pots is presented in the following chapter, but as far as the database is concerned, thirteen themes are used. An asterisk (\*) indicates themes which directly correlate with Steponaitis's themes of the same name (1983:349-350). In other cases, the equivalent Steponaitis themes are included in parentheses. In some cases there was no clear representation of a theme identified by Steponaitis (e.g., Human Head) and in that case the theme was not included in the database.

Figure 3.1. Table of the frequencies of themes from the Hemphill database.

|   |    |
|---|----|
| *Winged Serpent   | 59 |
| Trophy (Scalp, Skull, Forearm Bones, Hand and Eye)      | 37 |
| Paired Tails (Paired Tails (without heads))             | 22 |
| Crested Bird (Crested Bird, Paired Tails (with heads))  | 13 |
| *Radial Fingers   | 10 |
| Unknown   | 9  |
| Phantasmagoria (Bird With Serpent Head, Insect, Turtle) | 9  |
| *Raptor   | 8  |
| *Feather  | 4  |
| *Bilobed Arrow  | 4  |
| *Ogee   | 4  |
| *Greek Cross  | 1  |
| *Bird Tails   | 1  |

The database is the key to the image file, which consists of file folders containing all available photographs and drawings of Moundville engraved pots. Each folder was assigned a document number, by which the image file

was ordered. The image file contains 181 documents, including both vessels and fragments. The original catalog number and document number are recorded on the file folder, making for easy referencing of the images contained within. The sources of photographs in the file are C. B. Moore, Alabama Museum of Natural History, and Steponaitis. Drawings are from Moore, Fundaburke and Foreman, and original drawings made specifically for the file.

The drawings made at the time of collection of the images are identified in the database as "Lacefield drawings". In some cases they represent the only images of certain vessels, while in others they were made to clarify images which were indistinct, incomplete, or inaccurate in other drawings or photographs. Sometimes this included drawing the obverse side of a pot which had a drawing or photo of only one side. In several cases this was vital to recording the image, as in the case of the "Phantasmagoria" theme (which Steponaitis referred to as 'Birds with Serpent Heads'), vessel SD 805, shown in figure 3.2 below.

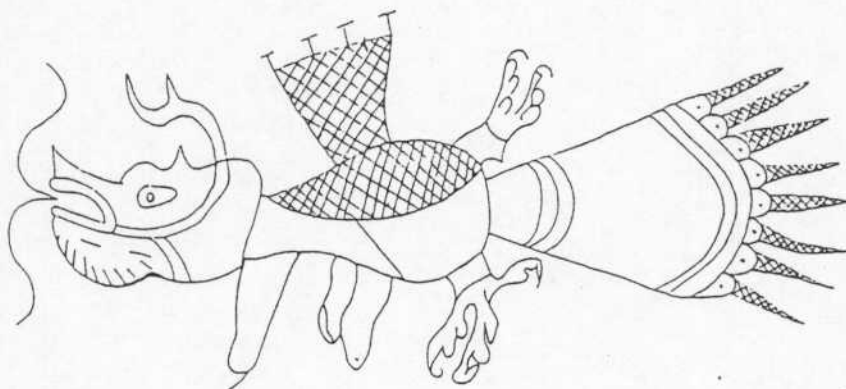


Figure 3.2. Vessel SD 805.

In another case, vessel NE 63, was misidentified as NE 68 and classified as *var. Wiggins* in Figure 44n of Steponaitis's book (Steponaitis 1983:187). *Var. Wiggins* is a nonrepresentational variety of Moundville Engraved (1983:322-323), but this mistake was cleared up in the appendix (1983:243, 345). Upon close examination, what at first appears to be a simple meander design turns out to be a remarkable and stylistically unique serpent with a rattled tail and radial T-bar finlike protrusions from its body. The photograph and drawing are compared below, figure 3.3.

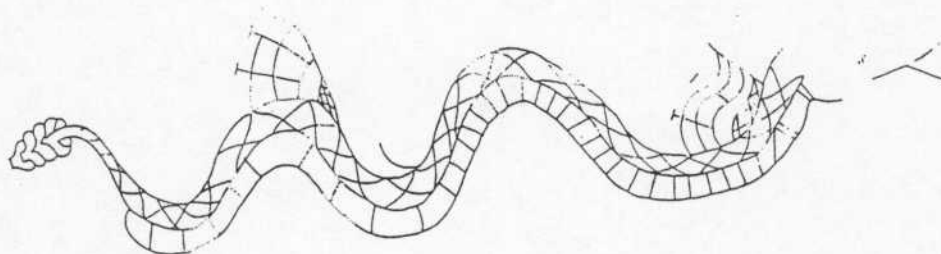


Figure 3.3. Vessel NE 63.

Especially in cases such as this where the whole circumference of the pot was used for the design, drawings were essential in representing the engraved image area. A photograph simply could not capture the whole design, nor even give a good indication of the complexity of the engraved image.

Initial drawings of the images from Moundville Engraved vessels were made using a crude digitizer on a turntable, which recorded accurate landmarks for use in drawing the images. There were two problems with this method of drawing. The first was that the images were engraved upon a highly convex surface, and the digitizer recorded the distance between points in two dimensions rather than three dimensions. This resulted in an elongation and exaggeration of the image area around the broadest circumference of the body of the vessels, and a foreshortening of the image on the areas which curved inward toward the neck and base of the vessel. The second problem was the sheer length of time it took to use this method to record the images. The digitizer was ultimately too inefficient to use on the number of vessels which had to be drawn.

Phillips and Brown faced much the same distortion problem with engraved designs on the surface of large shells. They dealt with this by making rubbings of the shells on dented, tailored tissue paper, and unfolding the paper so that the three-dimensional engraved image could be represented in two dimensions (Phillips and Brown 1978:23-24). Similar methods were attempted with Moundville Engraved pottery with less than stellar results. The rubbings did not capture the engravings well, at least

partially because the surfaces of the pots, in spite of looking quite smooth, were too rough to allow for good contrast with the engraving.

The method of drawing finally settled upon was that of drawing freehand the way the pot looked to an observer who was capable of turning the pot and seeing all three dimensions of it. The image recorded was a flattening of the curved design, drawn to scale, but showing the full engraving as if it had been engraved in two dimensions. This proved to be an efficient method of recording the images, and was used on thirty-three complete vessels and all of the fragments. Two vessels had already been completed using the digitizer, bringing the total of original drawings of complete vessels to thirty-five.

The image file and index, containing entries for 202 vessels and fragments, will be made available at the University of Alabama Department of Anthropology once this report has been completed. At the time of this writing, forty-two of the entries (an overwhelming number of these from the sherd collection) have not been illustrated. There are a hundred and thirty-three photographs and copies of photographs in the image file, which represents a hundred and thirty-four complete vessels and sixty-eight sherds.

This collection of images for comparison allowed for the description of themes found in Moundville engraved pottery, which are discussed in the next chapter. The identification of themes requires that as many of the potential representations of the theme be compared as possible, in order to delineate the variations within a theme and the differences between similar themes. An example of how this identification of themes may be done by the methods of stylistic analysis will also serve as explanation of why the



"Crested bird" and "Paired tails" themes, as I define them, differ from those themes of the same name defined by Steponaitis. While I placed more importance on the presence of a crested bird head in determining which theme was represented, Steponaitis based the primary determining factor in distinguishing crested birds from paired tails on the presence of court-card symmetry. Before this may be elaborated upon, it should be explained that court-card symmetry is frequently found in Mississippian art (Phillips and Brown 1978:67-68). This type of symmetry has an imaginary diagonal line which divides the two sections of the image, but rather than being reflected along that diagonal, the image repeats as though it were rotated 180 degrees around the center point of the dividing line, as in a face card from a common deck of playing cards, from which the term originated. Steponaitis's distinction between crested birds and paired tails is based more on manner of depiction, while mine is based on the number of shared motifs. As even the most different court-card crested bird representations have more motifs in common with one another than a representation of paired tails which lacks a crested bird head, I place all the representations with crested bird heads in the crested bird group, and all the paired tails without heads in the paired tails group.

This examination of motif variations, made possible by the comparison of all the available representations of Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* vessels, makes it possible to distinguish themes within the art. The relationship between themes and motifs will be further discussed in the following chapter, as will the prior definitions of theme and motif as have been applied to Mississippian art by researchers in the past. The themes I

have identified, based on previous work and my own stylistic analysis, will be discussed as well in the following chapter. Statistical analysis of the variation of motifs within a theme, which yields information about the stylistic similarity of representations within a theme designation, will be discussed in chapter five.

## Chapter Four

### Themes Found in Moundville Engraved *Var. Hemphill* Ceramics

Classification of the representations found on Moundville Engraved pots into themes is our first step toward analysis. Before that classification is introduced, a brief discussion of the definition of themes and motifs is in order, as different researchers have applied these terms in different ways. Phillips and Brown focused on the iconography of Spiro material and, with that in mind, moved away from Waring and Holder's definition of motif as being a free-standing form. They did not, however, go as far as most art historians who use the term motif to refer to the smallest unit of meaning. Rather, Phillips and Brown used motif to refer to those identifiable parts which make up a theme, and a theme as a "comprehensive organization of form" (Phillips and Brown 1978:104-105). Steponaitis used the term motif in much the same way as Phillips and Brown used theme, and cautioned that his interest in the identification of these motifs was in no way associated with any meaning which might be associated with them (Steponaitis 1983:58). For the purposes of this study, a *theme* shall be used to designate recurrent compositions that show stability in their motifs; and is identifiable in terms of those motifs. *Motif* shall be used to refer to one of the component forms of thematic material which allow themes to be identified; a unit of form which may recur in different thematic contexts.

Eleven specific themes were identified and recorded in the database, plus one group of themes called "Phantasmagoria" and one additional group

miscellaneous images, bringing the number of classes to thirteen. Of the specific themes, the winged serpent was the most frequent, followed by the trophy theme, the paired tails theme, and the crested birds theme (see Figure 3.1). The raptor, while an important theme in terms of stylistic analysis, had few representations in this collection.

The raptor theme shows the most skillful execution of design found in engraved art at Moundville.

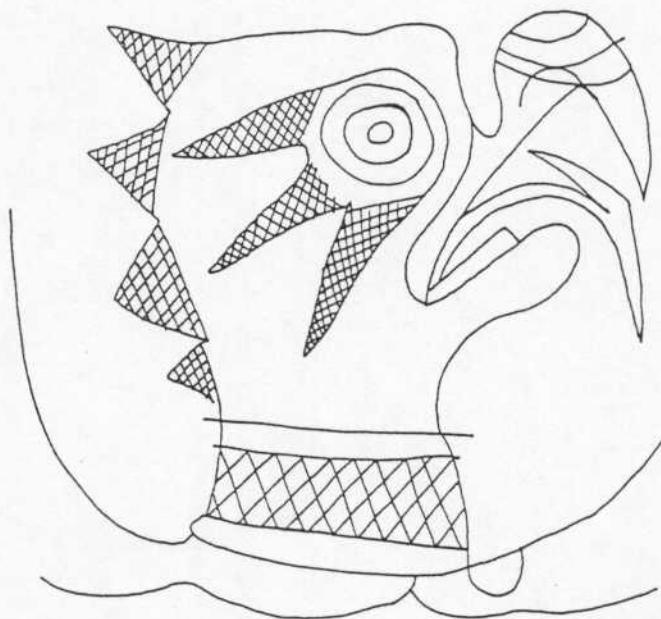


Figure 4.1. Vessel SD 362.

The engraved lines are smooth and carefully executed, and the cross-hatching is more regular and even than is generally found in the other themes. Although vessels with the raptor design are few in number, there are enough images to conduct a preliminary stylistic assessment of this theme. Raptors are usually depicted "in the round" as C. B. Moore termed it

(Moore 1905). In this method of depiction, the body of the bird is engraved on the base of the pot, and the head, tail, and wings extend from the body up the sides of the vessel. A few raptor depictions are found in conjunction with the hand motif, or with severed tails. In such cases, disembodied heads are engraved in a limited image area encircling the widest area of the globular body of the bottle.

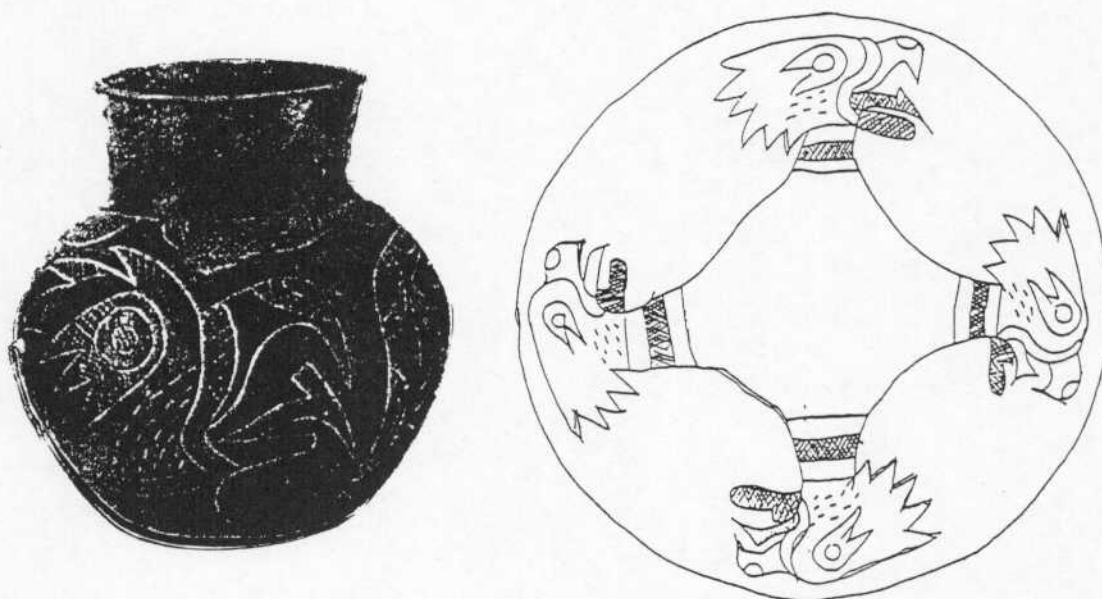


Figure 4.2. Full bodied raptor, vessel NE 80, and raptor heads, vessel SD 54.

For a variety of reasons, I hesitate to include these images with the raptor theme. The association with the hand and tail motif raises certain questions about whether these bird heads should warrant classification with the raptor theme or should be treated as motifs. Perhaps these images should be given substyle designation within the raptor theme, or perhaps they should be classified as components of a separate theme. The presence of these images in association with hands may indicate that they should be

included in the trophy theme, but much more evidence needs to be produced to be able to assert this with any confidence whatsoever. This area of study of Moundville art merits further examination, beyond the scope of this research.

The raptor theme has a number of identifying motifs which allow for stylistic analysis of the images. These are: eye, forked eye surround, beak, tongue, necklace, crest, body, tail, tail feathers, tail markings, wingbar, and feather markings.

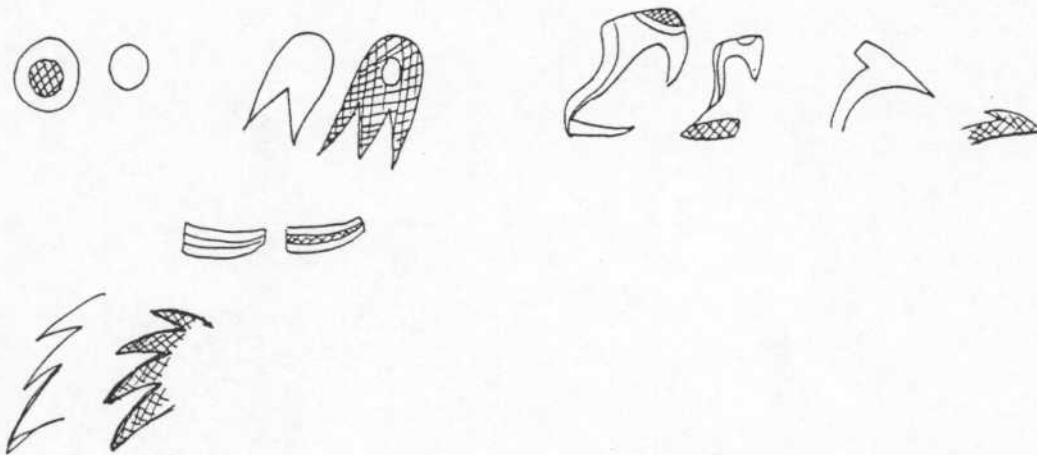


Figure 4.3. Identifying motifs of the Raptor theme.

Stylistic variations of these motifs and the combinations of these motifs can be used to gauge similarities and differences between representations of the raptor theme. It is immediately obvious that there are two highly dissimilar representations of the raptor: that of single, full bodied birds and that of multiple disembodied bird heads. It is possible that the two types of representations of raptors should be examined separately, but there are so few vessels with the raptor theme to begin with that, for the time being, they

will be classified as one. Thorough stylistic analysis of this theme should answer some of these questions about this theme and whether it should be considered as representing two distinct substyles.

The winged serpent theme is the best known, the most often represented, and one of the most intriguing themes found in Moundville Engraved pottery. In a distinct majority of vessels with this theme, there are two nearly identical winged serpent depictions in the image area, which surrounds the widest part of the globular base section of the bottle. The two representations generally face the same direction, toward the observer's right, as shown in figure 4.4.

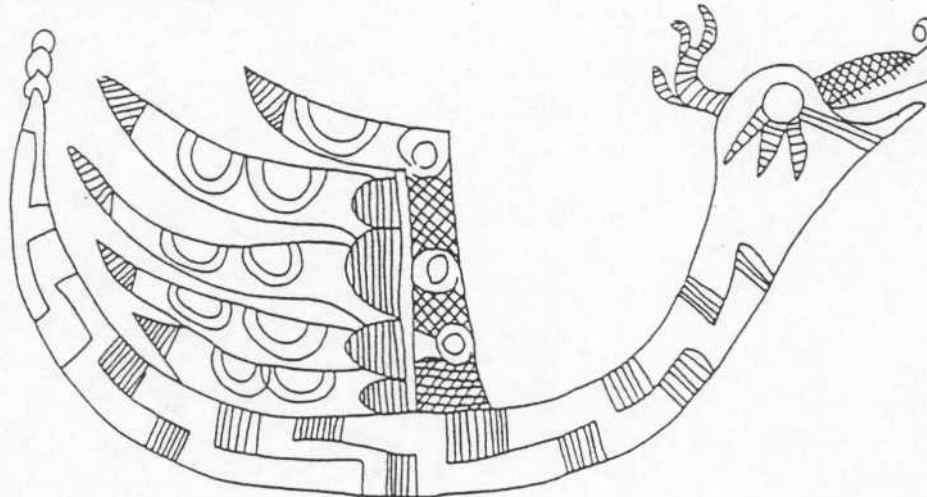


Figure 4.4. "Winged serpent" theme. Vessel NB.

There is one notable exception to this in vessel NE 596, figure 4.5, which appears for certain other reasons to be executed in something other than the normal Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* style. NE 596 depicts two winged serpents facing each other with tongue-like protrusions from the eyes. This depiction is markedly different from other winged serpents found at

Moundville, where the bifurcating tongue (in a very few instances it has three prongs), clearly comes from the mouth. The depiction of the wings is also markedly different than the norm for *var. Hemphill*, with NE 596 having bunched wing feathers rather than nicely arranged parallel wing feathers springing from a distinct wingbar. Also, the body of NE 596 is unmarked, which makes this depiction unique at Moundville.

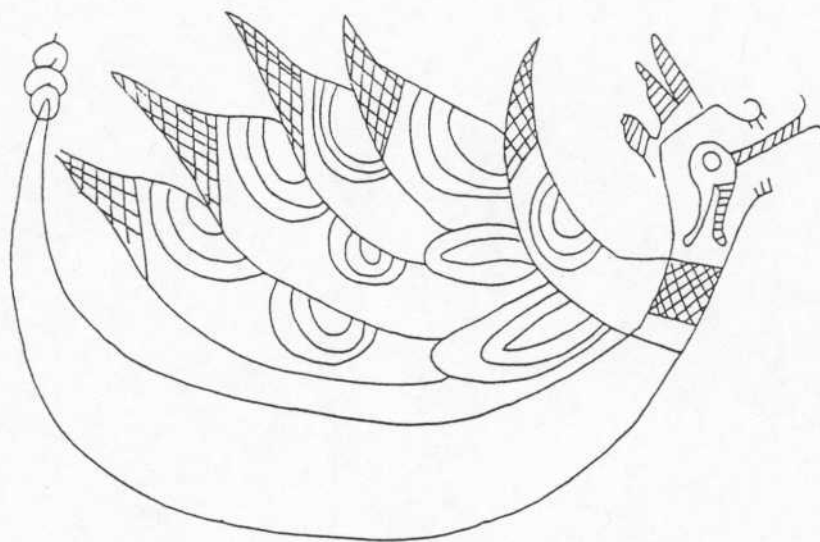


Figure 4.5. Vessel NE 596.

The motifs which make up a Moundville winged serpent are: upturned head with bifurcating tongue, mouth (which is generally beaklike to some degree), eye, eye surround, horns or feather crest, necklace, U-shaped body, body markings, wingbar, feathers, and tail rattles.



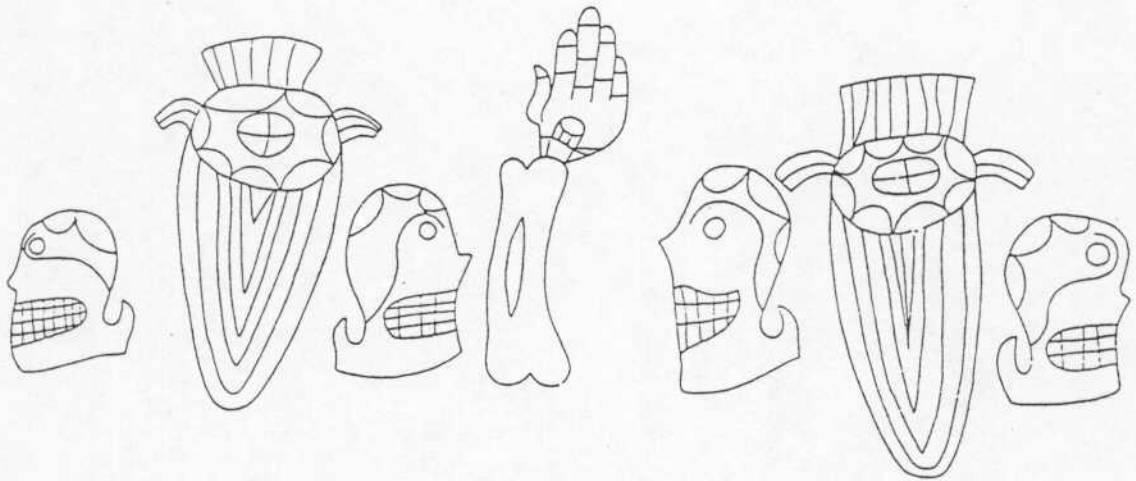


Figure 4.6. "Trophy" theme. Vessel NR 9.

The "Trophy" theme is composed of those images which Steponaitis refers to as the scalp, skull, forearm bones, and hand and eye motifs (1983:58-63). As before stated, a theme is made up of some combination of motifs which serve to identify it, but not all of the identifying motifs are necessarily present in the image for it to be identified as the theme. This is certainly the case with the trophy theme, as it is rare to find all of the motifs which identify it in a single composition. In fact, it was the way that the skull, hand and eye, scalp and arm bones occurred in so many variable combinations with each other that led to the identification of this theme.

In many instances, particular motifs are found repeated and not in association with any of the other motifs of the theme. Prime examples of this are the hand and eye motif and the scalp motif. The hand and eye motif has been considered an independent grouping by most prior researchers of Moundville art who classified representational themes or motifs. It is not

without caution that I include it as part of the trophy theme. McKenzie understood the importance of determining why the hand and eye is found so often in association with what were clearly death-related motifs. He included it in the grouping of these motifs (McKenzie 1964:182), as I have included it in the trophy theme. One of the problems with calling each of the motifs in the trophy theme an individual theme is the difficulty of explaining why they occur in combination with each other whereas so few other Moundville themes are found with other themes. There is one wholly unique image, on vessel NR40 (Figure 4.17), which seems to be an exception to this lack of association between themes on a single vessel, but it is also an exception to many of the other trends in Moundville art. This exception will be discussed in detail with the theme "phantasmagoria". The trophy theme also includes representations on Moundville Incised vessels, which were excluded from this study of Moundville Engraved ceramics. All of these representations of this well known but little researched theme should be included in future analysis which will hopefully yield clues to how the motifs either work together or stand alone to make up the theme.

I have distinguished the crested bird and paired tails theme from one another in a somewhat different way than Steponaitis did. He characterized crested birds as those not associated with paired tails, and limited them to a single isolated head and their few full body representations (Steponaitis 1983:59-61).

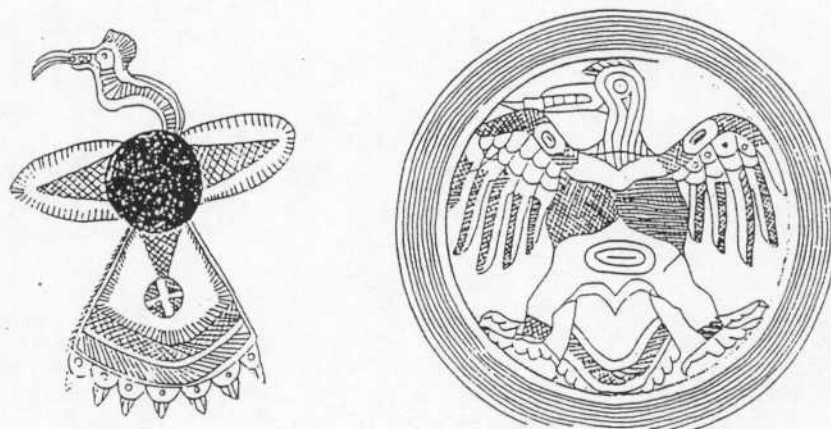


Figure 4.7. Two full body crested birds. Vessel SD 86/M7 and SD 472. This leads to only four representations characterized by Steponaitis as representing the crested bird theme (1983:349). One of those four has no image currently available, and the other three I included as crested birds as well. However, of the 23 vessels which Steponaitis (1983:350) gave paired tail designations, I culled the ten which had crested bird heads and included them with the crested bird theme.

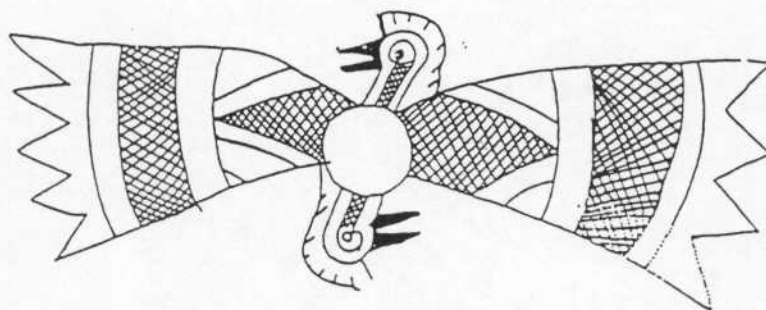


Figure 4.8. Representative from "Crested bird" theme which had formerly been considered "Paired tails" theme. Vessel SD 93/M7. From Moore 1907:363.

There was one other image which Steponaitis included in the paired tail theme which I reclassified as phantasmagoria, as it was the only instance of raptors represented in court card symmetry with tails that were stylistically unique in the Moundville collection. This was vessel NE 145, which was referred to in the image file as "court card chickens," a misnomer which serves to draw attention to its uniqueness in the sample (see figure 4.12, p. 50). In case this designation should be deemed eccentric or wildly inaccurate, Holmes noted how much a similar representation looked like a chicken in 1886 (Holmes 1886:388), so it is not merely this researcher's odd imagination.

In general, the crested bird and paired tail themes are closely related stylistically, yet they are distinct from one another. This is true in more ways than the obvious presence of the bird head in court card symmetry with the tails. A stylistic comparison of the tails alone shows that the tails which are associated with crested bird heads are stylistically distinct from those which are not. The motifs which were used to demonstrate the stylistic differences between the tails of these themes are: tail feathers, tail markings, tail medallion, upper tail markings, and central medallion.

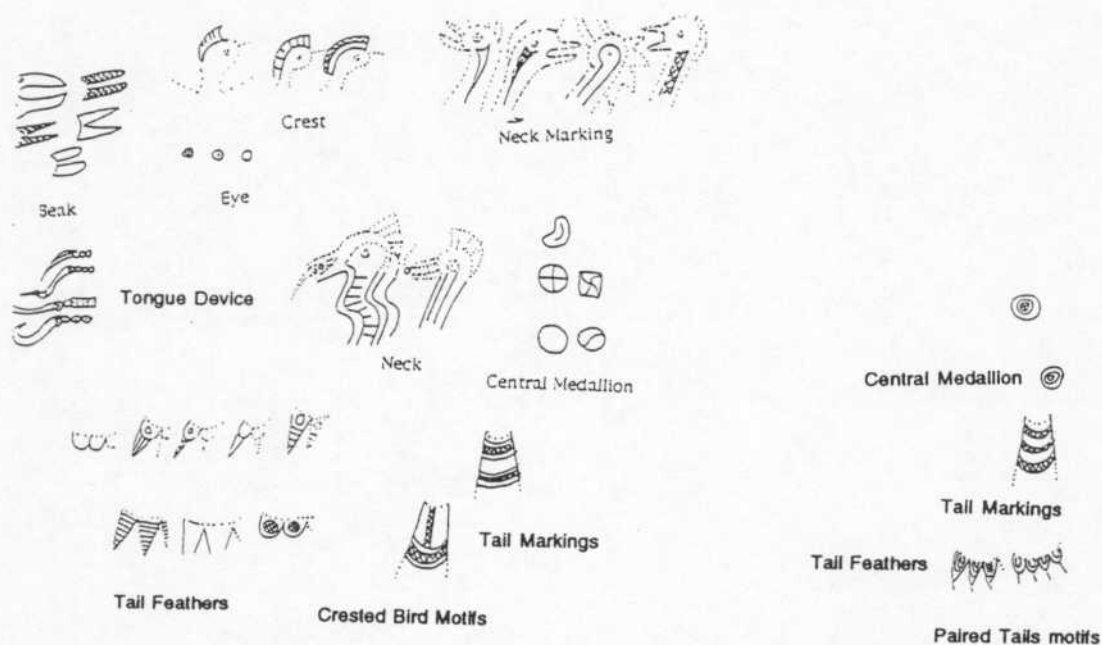


Figure 4.9. Motifs which make up tails of crested birds versus motifs which make up tails of paired tails.

There are also clear stylistic trends within the theme of crested bird itself. The motifs which allowed this comparison were: eye, neck, neck markings, crest, beak, tongue device, wings, and other associated motifs. A more thorough discussion of the crested bird theme will follow in a later section of this thesis. The identification of stylistic trends and changes within a theme allows the researcher to discover which are the important identifying motifs, as they are the ones which are less likely to be shorthanded or lost through stylistic variation. If we can identify those instances when a stylistically distinct shorthand version of a theme is used to represent the whole in relation to other themes, we are a step closer to being able to understand the role of the theme in the greater body of the art of the culture.

Briefly, our designation of "unknown" as the theme classification means either that there was not enough of the image to discern which theme

it was, or the theme was neither one of the named themes, nor assignable to the phantasmagoria class. In most cases, the "unknown" designation was the result of the first reason, or a combination of the two.

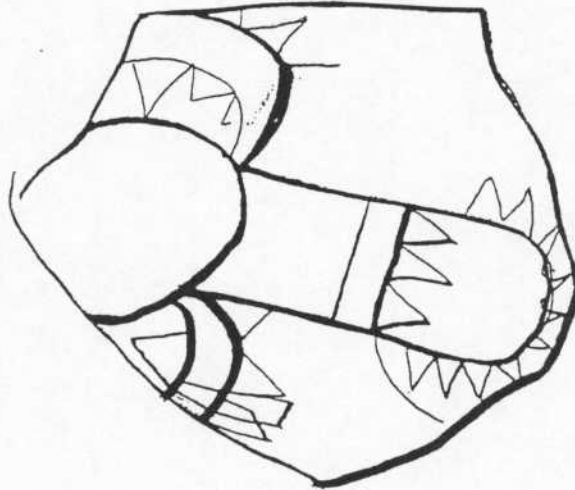


Figure 4.10. Example of unknown theme. Sherd M-p 21098.

The bilobed arrow, the bird tails, the ogee, the Greek cross, the feather, and the radial finger themes are here treated as the same as the motifs of the same names as determined by Steponaitis (1983:59-62). None of these have many representations in the Moundville Engraved image file.

The radial fingers theme is distinct from the radial fingers motif which is found as part of other themes (such as the paired tails or crested bird themes).

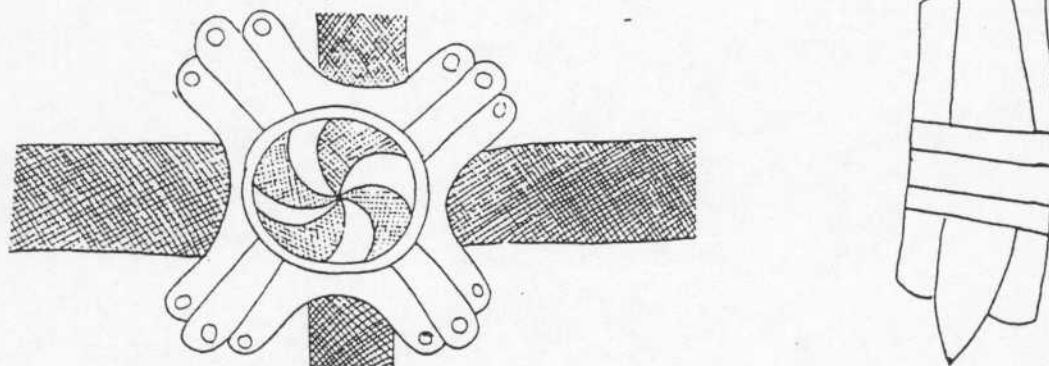


Figure 4.11. Radial fingers theme versus radial fingers motif. Vessel SD 7/M7 and vessel SE 16.

Although the theme and motif may represent the same thing, it is the way which they are used within the image that determines whether a particular representation of radial fingers is a theme or motif. In general, the radial fingers theme is found standing alone, while the radial fingers motif is found as a part of some other theme. While the indications of the radial fingers theme may be extrapolated from the associations of the motif, stylistic and iconographic analysis of the bilobed arrow, bird tails, ogee, Greek cross and feather themes are beyond the scope of this research. None of these latter themes are represented often enough in Moundville Engraved art to be able to analyze them for stylistic trends and associations.

Finally, the theme designation "phantasmagoria" refers to those images which are complete and identifiable as *something*, yet distinctly different from any other within the corpus of Moundville Engraved art.

Phillips and Brown use the term "phantasmagoria" to refer to those images which:

are not just original; they are one feels intensely personal, even private ... They make no sense whatever to us, even on the factual level, but are executed with skill and assurance, completely ruling ineptness out of consideration. It would seem that the artist knew exactly what he was doing in order to be able to do it so well, somewhat in the manner of surrealism. But it goes beyond surrealism which, if we understand it correctly, is a calculated distortion of reality. Here, it seems, reality has little to do with it.  
(Phillips and Brown 1978:143)

This lengthy, yet elegant definition has only one problem in this researcher's mind, that it could apply as well to a most of the art that has at some point been considered to be part of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. I use "phantasmagoria" to refer to those unique creatures which have no other representation in Moundville Engraved pottery. This theme represents a hodgepodge of individual anomalous creatures with motifs representing a combination of natural prototypes not found in the other Moundville themes. In spite of the strangeness of the creatures represented, in some cases the Moundville Engraved style is still easily recognizable. In others, the identification of the Moundville style is difficult, as there are no other representations at Moundville to which it could be compared. Thus, it is hard to determine from the image alone if it simply a unique vessel from Moundville, or an imported vessel. A case in point is NE 145, mentioned before in the paired tails section.



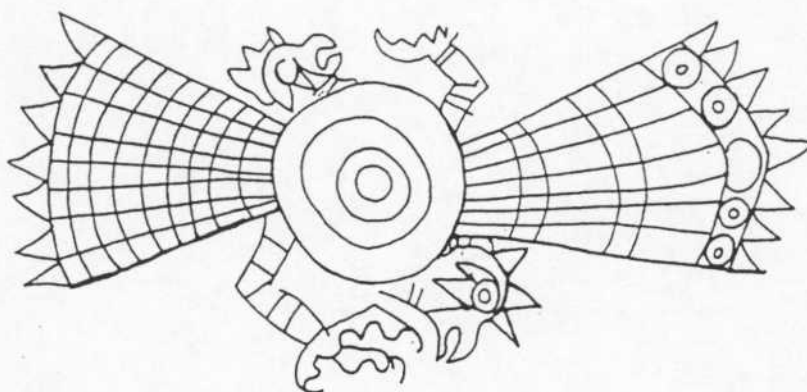
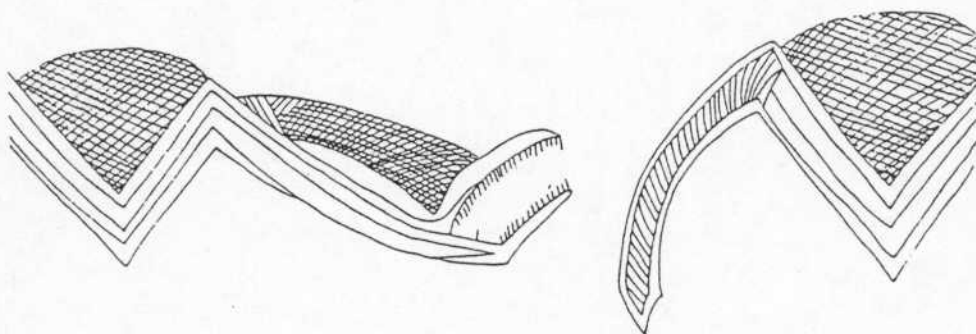


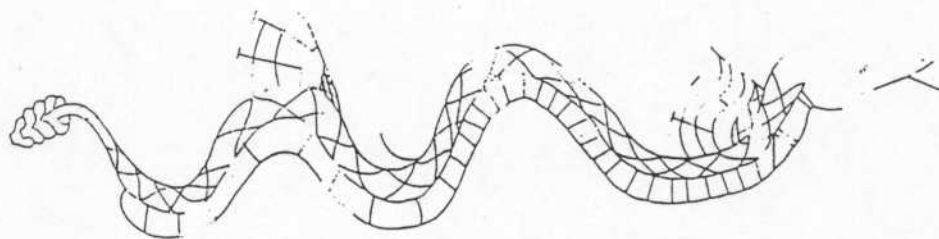
Figure 4.12. Vessel NE 145.

The court card symmetry, and the combination of bird heads and tails makes it appear at first to be assignable to the crested bird theme or the paired tails theme. Further examination reveals that these are not the familiar Moundvillian court card crested birds. Their curved beaks and jagged triangular crests, as well as the forked eye-surrounds and neckbands make these birds easily identifiable as raptors. Rather than the wings which sometimes form diagonals with more ordinary crested birds, these court card raptors have legs and feet with curved talons gracing the diagonal. Also, the depiction of the tails, which seemingly would place this representation with the "paired tails" theme, are depicted in a manner entirely unlike any of the other paired tails from Moundville. Crossing lines filling the tail is simply not found in Moundville paired tails, nor is a band with concentric circles in the tail, nor empty triangles as the tail feathers. While NE 145 seems at first to be depicted in typical Moundville Engraved style, this representation is unique in the whole of Southeastern Indian art. From this image's style alone, there is no way to tell what its origin might have been.

Two other very different representations, one of which had been identified as a serpent (Steponaitis 1983:350), and the other not representational, also earned inclusion into the phantasmagoria category.



NR 99



NE 63

Figure 4.13. Vessels NR 99 and NE 63.

Vessel NR 99 appears at first glance to be a nonrepresentational design, with zagging lines wrapping around the body of the vessel. The lines terminate into a striped tail and an open mouth with teeth, quickly dispelling the notion that this design is anything other than a serpent. The second of these, NE 63, was identified by Steponaitis as a serpent representation

(Steponaitis 1983:243), but not included in the representational motif index for some reason. Although there was a photograph of this vessel showing a meander with dorsal/ventral distinctions, it was not until the close examination preceding drawing that I discovered that there were indeed rattles on the tail. The termination of the ventral section in a sharp curve near the end of the tail, with the dorsal section continuing to the rattle segment bears a striking resemblance to the transition from body to tail shown in the sandstone rattlesnake palette also from Moundville. This may not appear to be significant, nor even interesting, but Figures 4.4, 4.5, 6.1, and indeed every other winged serpent representation from Moundville Engraved pottery does not show the ventral side terminating, with the dorsal side continuing to the rattled end of the tail. It is much more normal to have some change of body markings near the tail to set it apart. As dorsal/ventral distinctions are not highly emphasized in Moundville Engraved representations, it is not surprising that the termination of the ventral side is given little attention. As shown on vessel NE 63, the rattlesnake palette, and a number of representations from other sites (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4) this manner of depicting the transition from body to tail of a snake is fairly common elsewhere, just not in Moundville Engraved art.

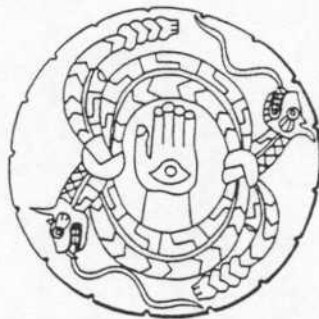


Figure 4.14. Rattlesnake palette. From C. B. Moore (1905:136).

Further study turned up something even more surprising. There were two finlike radial t-bar protrusions from the undulating body of the snake. The radial t-bar is found in other associations in Moundville, but never has it been found as a part of a depiction of a creature. Although vessel SD 805, Figure 4.15, has a cross-hatched wing which terminates in t-bars, this is unlike the radial t-bar which is found as an isolated motif with concentric circles cut by t-bars radiating from the center. Vessel NE 63 has radial t-bars with only the slightest bit of cross-hatching near the body of the snake.

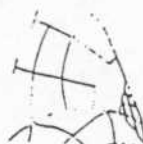


Figure 4.15. Vessel NE 63, SE 16. Radial t-bar as part of snake versus free-floating motif.

Another unique Moundville monster is referred to by Steponaitis as a bird with serpent head (1983:349). This creature perfectly embodies the spirit of the phantasmagoria theme as I define it. I must admit a bit of personal favoritism shown to this particular vessel resulting from its careful representation (its engraving is on the level of the raptor depictions), relatively good state of preservation (most of the image area was still visible), and most of all, the unique and interesting combination of natural prototypes that make it up.

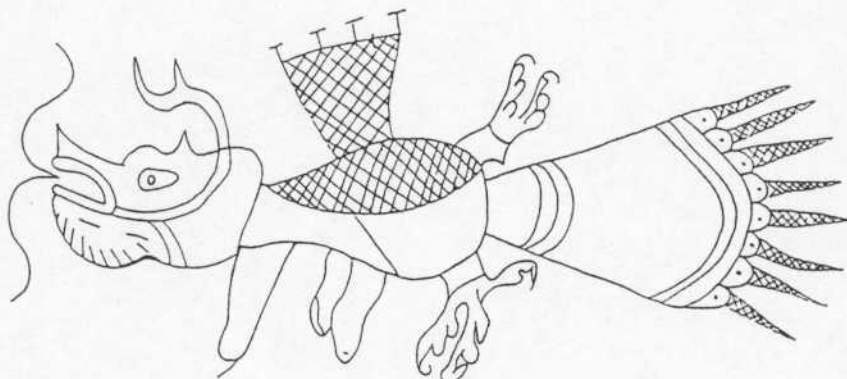


Figure 4.16. Vessel SD 805.

The tail of this creature would not be out of place in the least on a crested bird depiction, nor would the three-toed taloned feet be out of place with a raptor. The horns might easily be found on a winged serpent, but this combination, especially with the addition of a t-bar wing, finlike protrusions, and a turtle-like head with an exaggerated throat pouch make this creature wholly unique.

While space does not permit the thorough discussion of each individual vessel within the phantasmagoria theme, it would be amiss not to mention vessel NR40, which seems to be a link between the representations of flying serpents and the nonrepresentational type Moundville Engraved, *var. Wiggins* (to which the vessel is technically classified by Steponaitis (1983:258).



Figure 4.17. Vessel NR 40.

It is also the only depiction among Moundville Engraved ceramics which seems to show a scene, or one of the Moundville monsters in action. Discussion of the implications of this image will have to await further research, and hopefully other finds which would support what this image seems to convey. Vessel NR 40 appears to show a raptor with a squat, fishlike body in association with a pot of the sort most often seen in shell gorgets (see Strong 1989:234-235, Figures 55 and 64). A scalloped skull of the type usually found with the "trophy" theme is associated with this scene as well, although exactly what is going on through the association of these representations is unknown.

The designation "phantasmagoria" should not be considered a theme so much as a grouping of individual and unique representations which have a shared importance in understanding Moundville Engraved art. The term

"other" would not have given justice to this fascinating collection of oddities among the diverse corpus of Moundville representative art.

## **Chapter Five Stylistic Analysis**

The stylistic analysis which allows for comparisons of the sort done in the previous chapter is the basis of iconography, but is not iconography in and of itself. As iconography is the study of themes, and the implication is that themes embody some meaning, iconography inevitably must follow the understanding of themes which springs from quantifiable stylistic analysis. This stylistic analysis of forms without respect to any potential meanings allows for same/different distinctions of the motifs which make up the themes. This, in turn, makes possible understandings of stylistic change through time, and allows for all the possible variations of the same theme to be recognized. Also, connections between themes, and those similarities which link them may be analyzed to further understand how themes relate to one another in the corpus of Moundville art. It is those thematic analyses which give us some indication of meaning, yet without stylistic analysis at its foundation, these potential meanings are little better than guesses based on personal inclination.

Clear definitions of style as opposed to iconography are necessary to the justification of the priority of stylistic analysis in interpreting and understanding the art of prehistoric peoples. Style may be used in two senses, the general and the specific. In the general sense, style is pure form, with no determination of meaning or potential meaning whatsoever. In the specific sense, style is a set of conventional manners of treating lines,



surface, textures and shapes. When we speak of stylistic analysis, we look to the similarities and differences of the forms which make up the corpus of images under investigation. We may speak of stylistic analysis (the study of forms) which leads to the definition of a Moundville style (an identifiable and recognizable manner of depicting forms). Iconography is the study of themes in art. Those themes are identifiable and defined by stylistic analysis which isolates their component motifs and shows the ways those motifs interact.

The selection of stylistic variables which are used in the statistical analysis of same/different distinctions is the primary deciding factor in how valid those distinctions may be. If the variables are well chosen to reflect actual stylistic differences in representation, then the stylistic groupings based on statistical analysis of them are more likely to be usable in terms of understanding stylistic change and variation in the art. This selection process in this study was the result of examining all the representations of a given theme and identifying the motifs which made it up. This was accomplished by identifying all the elements which the images had in common, and the possible variations of those elements among the corpus of images, as was demonstrated with "Crested bird" and "Paired tails" themes in chapter three. Any element which was identifiable in the theme through the many stylistic transformations of the theme was determined to be a motif, and all of its variations were coded first onto index cards, and later for computer analysis. Figure 5.1 shows all of the variations of each motif of the "Crested bird" and "Paired tails" themes which were identified and later codified for quantitative purposes.

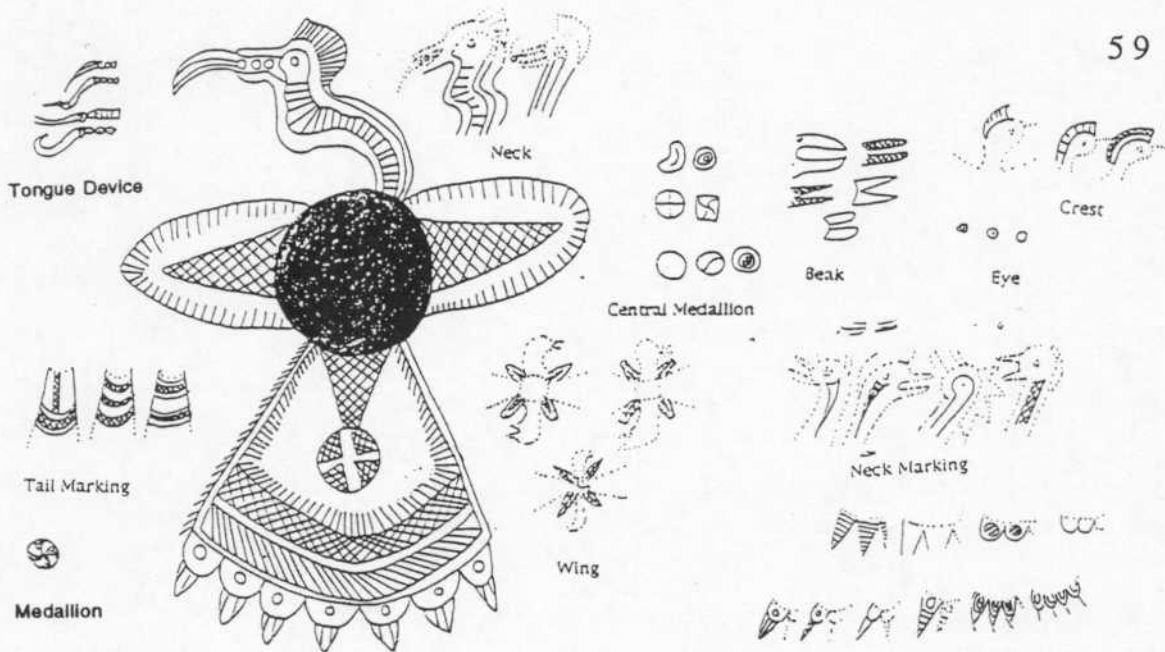


Figure 5.1. "Crested bird" and "Paired tails" themes' component motifs and their variations.

The data analysis of these stylistic variables was based on the variations of motifs found within the closely linked paired tails and crested bird themes. After all of the variations of motifs were identified, each image was coded according to which of the variations of motifs made up that particular image. There were 42 identified variations of motifs, and 22 images which were coded for presence or absence of each of these variations. These binary data were analyzed with the SPSSX statistics package using the coefficient of Dice.

The coefficient of Dice allows for positive matches to be given double weight, while negative matches (those where each image lacked a particular variation of a motif) are ignored. This allows for a matrix of proximity data to be generated, which shows how stylistically similar each image is to every other image. To produce a graph of this data, however, the proximity data had to be transformed to distance data. This, too, was done through SPSSX.

Although SPSSX has multidimensional scaling programs, it was decided that SYSTAT had better options for scaling, so the distance data was transferred from SPSSX to SYSTAT. Using SYSTAT's multidimensional scaling program, a graph in three dimensions was generated. This graph placed stylistically similar images close together and stylistically different images further apart.

The way multidimensional scaling works is that the distances between all of the given cases are used to generate a map. This estimates how closely related each case is to all of the other cases. An example of how this works is to take the distances between major cities in the US and use multidimensional scaling to make a two dimensional map. This map would look very similar to a geographic map with those same cities (Kruskal and Wish 1978: 7-9). What I wished the map to show was how stylistically similar each representation was to each other one. Very similar images would be close together, while the more different the images were from one another, the further apart they would be on the map. This provided a visual chart of the range of variation of *var. Hemphill* crested bird and paired tails representations as well as showing how they clustered together. The ultimate goal of such an analysis is to discover what the dimensions of variations represent.

In the case of stylistic distances, three dimensions were selected to produce the most accurate representation of the data. Once the cases were plotted on the three dimensions, the graphs were imported into Acrospin, a program which allows rotation of the graphs to see exactly how each of the

points is related to each other in all of the three dimensions. The resulting graph is shown in figure 5.2, below.

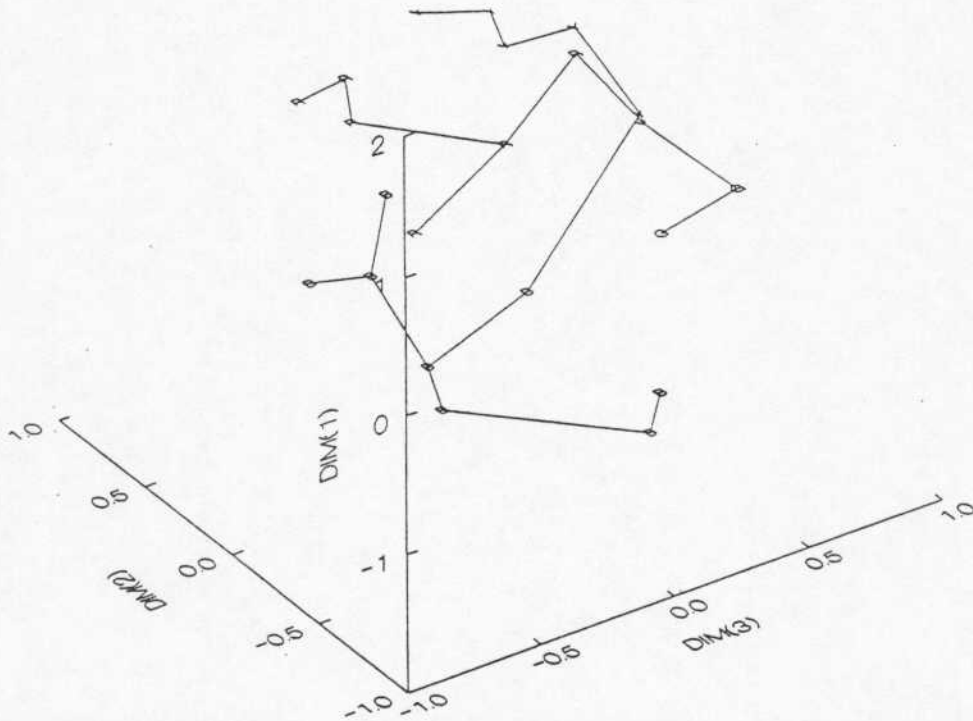


Figure 5.2. B indicates classification as "Paired tails" theme, R indicates a fancy "Crested bird" theme vessel, Y indicates a plain "Crested bird" theme vessel, and G indicates an intermediate "Crested bird" theme vessel.

Of course, the construction of such graphs based on stylistic variation is only useful if it allows for interpretation of the dimensions. The definition of substyles is one of the interpretations which this statistical technique makes possible. In general, substyles were identified based upon fairly well bounded clusters of stylistically similar images. Additionally, the images which fell on the borders of the stylistic clusters provide information about how the substyles may be related to one another. This identification of

intermediate or borderline cases is one of the strengths of statistical stylistic analysis, as it provides much clearer positioning of these cases relative to the closer stylistic groupings than would ever be possible based on observer analysis. To demonstrate this visually, a representative case from the middle of each cluster and the relative closeness between the clusters is shown in the following illustration, figure 5.3. Additionally, one of the intermediate images is shown where it was stylistically placed by the statistical analysis.

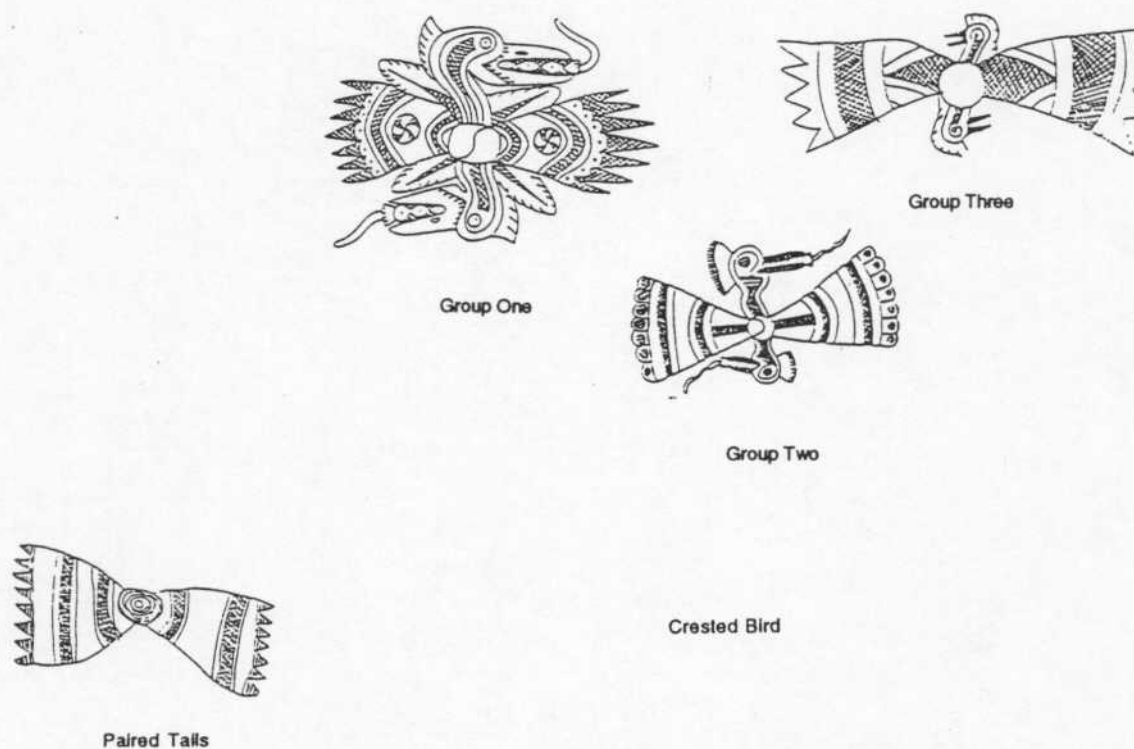


Figure 5.3. Visual representations from the data map.

The temptation to the researcher is to either place the image with others to which it bears some resemblance, or to set it aside as its own group without

regard to how it relates to other clusters of images. Statistical analysis helps to prevent the researcher from allowing favoritism toward certain motifs which appear to indicate meaning when designating stylistic groups. Statistical analysis allows each motif to have the same weight as each other motif, rather than allowing focus on those which the researcher may deem more interesting. Of course, the initial designation of motifs allows for human preference and error to creep in and potentially damage the results of the stylistic analysis.

As mentioned before, the interpretation of the dimensions which define the clusters is the primary purpose of performing this analysis. In the case of the stylistic analysis of the crested birds, there are indications that time is one of the deciding factors which define the distinct substyles evidenced by the multidimensional scaling. The general indication, based upon Steponaitis' chronology of Moundville pottery and Knight's ongoing excavations at Moundville, is that the more elaborate forms of engraved images are earlier. This is supported by Phillips and Brown's findings at Spiro, that the finer representations are associated with the earlier phases (Phillips and Brown 1978:31). Using the clusters of stylistically similar images as defined by the statistical analysis, this would indicate that group one (see figure 5.3) is most likely the earliest manifestation of crested bird imagery on Moundville ceramics. Given the distinctive nature of the two images which represent group two, and the fact that they bear more similarity to group one images than to anything else, they probably occur early in the sequence as well. The exact placement of the group two substyle in the chronology of Moundville crested bird images is unclear at this point, but

stylistic analysis alone will not allow for any more refined judgment in this case. With cases such as this, the lack of precise dating of individual vessels from their contexts is felt most acutely. Hopefully, the ongoing excavations with accurate carbon 14 dating of the contexts in which stylistically identifiable sherds are found will resolve the questions left unanswered by the stylistic analysis as it has been practiced here.

## **Chapter Six** **Definition of *Variety Hemphill* Style**

The definition of themes based on stylistic elements is the basis of iconography, but this is not the sole role of stylistic analysis. Identification of motifs and their variations is also important in the type of stylistic analysis which may distinguish one cultural group from another, insofar as the way that the same theme has different component motifs in different regions helps to identify the particular style of each group. Definition of Hemphill style is predicated on the analysis of stylistic variables, and is a valuable non-iconographic analysis. Usually, any analysis of Mississippian art which includes images from Moundville engraved pots uses them to highlight the similarity of representation which is found throughout the Mississippian Southeast. This similarity is in both the manner of depiction (e.g., engraving) and the matter of the depiction (e.g., themes). Although this thesis is about Moundville art, it will address the similarities with engraved pottery from other sites as well. The most important and potentially useful regional comparisons with Moundville are: the Walls/Nodena phases in the Central Mississippi Valley; the Kogers Island phase in the Tennessee Valley; the Pensacola phase in the Northern Gulf Coast; and the Savannah phase in Coastal and Central Georgia. Before the artistic analysis may proceed, some background of the location and chronology of each of these phases is in order. Figure 6.1 shows each of these regions in relation to one another.



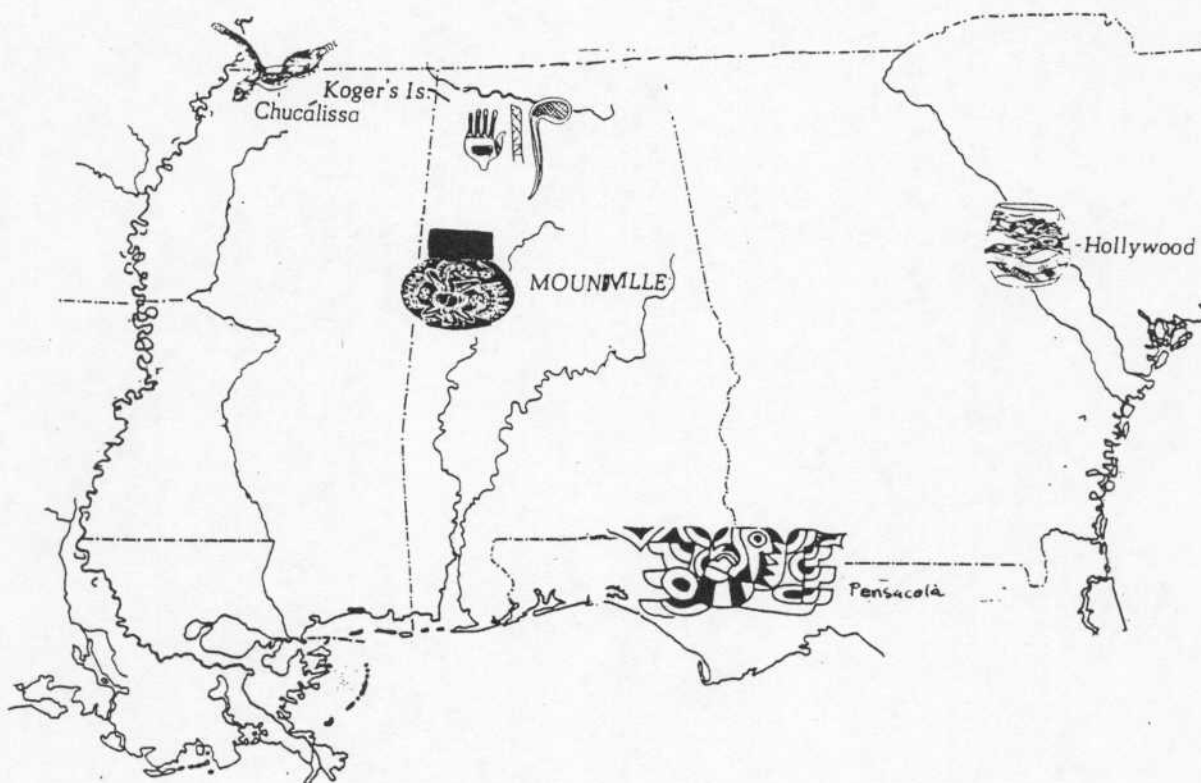


Figure 6.1. Location of Moundville, Walls, Kogers Island, and Pensacola phases, and Hollywood site in the Southeast. After Phillips and Brown (Phillips and Brown 1978).

After examination of representations of pottery from these sites, a very interesting trend became obvious. Although certain themes were held in common between Moundville and each of these groups, they were clearly stylistically distinct from Moundville. The similarities each shared with Moundville were different thematically as well as stylistically, with Walls and Hollywood having the "Winged Serpent" theme, and Kogers Island and Pensacola having the "Raptor" theme. Additionally, Walls has the distinction of some fairly interesting variations on the "Crested Birds" and "Paired Tails" themes. An understanding of the distribution of certain themes through neighboring groups to Moundville would be a worthwhile study, but is not covered here. It is the definition of a Moundville style, distinct from the engraved art style or styles of each of these other groups which is the focus of this chapter.

The characteristics which make up the *var. Hemphill* style were determined from examination of all of the representations which were available at the time of the study. This analysis was conducted independently from analysis of the art of any other group for obvious reasons. This analysis was not made in a comparative context, but if done successfully, it ought to be useful for comparative analysis. A certain range of variation is expected within any corpus of art which encompasses many artists and many years of production. The question to ask in order to support or undermine the hypothesis of a unified Moundville style is: is this range of variation great enough to encompass art from other groups? Our comparison of each of these other groups to Moundville is incomplete, for such a comparison should involve equally thorough stylistic analysis of the

art of each of the other groups as has already been done for Moundville. This type of stylistic analysis of a group's art is tedious, but could be done by practically anyone who has access to the corpus of images and follows the methods laid out in the previous two chapters. Moundville art was the focus of this study, and the stylistic analysis of art from the other groups is only given in contrast, to distinguish it from the Moundville style. Thus, only single representations of thematic material are used in contrast to typical examples of the same theme from Moundville art. The two themes which will be treated thus are the "Raptor" theme and the "Winged Serpent" theme. Two representations from Walls and one from Hollywood will be contrasted with Moundville "Winged Serpent" theme representations, and two Pensacola "Raptor" theme representations will be contrasted with Moundville engraved pots with the same theme. The comparison will begin with a classic example of a Moundville "Winged Serpent," from NE 57, figure 6.2.

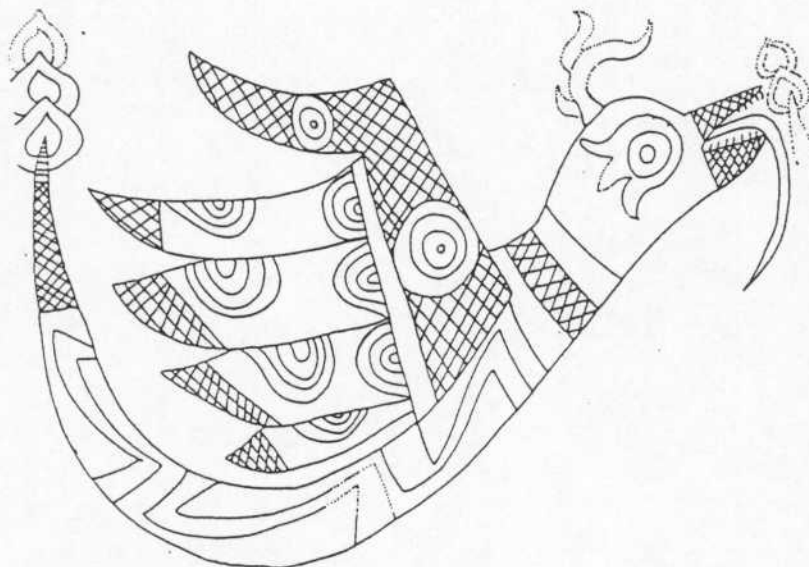


Figure 6.2. Vessel NE 57.

This Moundville example is to be contrasted with a Walls "Winged Serpent" and another, simply "Rattlesnake" theme pot. These are figures 6.3 and 6.4, respectively. First, the similarities shall be pointed out, then the differences which show these styles to be distinct. Figure 6.3 shows a side view of a winged serpent facing right, which has horns, a head with an eye-surround, neckbands, curving body with markings, a wing made up of a wingbar and a few feathers, and a rattled tail. Each of these motifs are also found in figure 6.2.

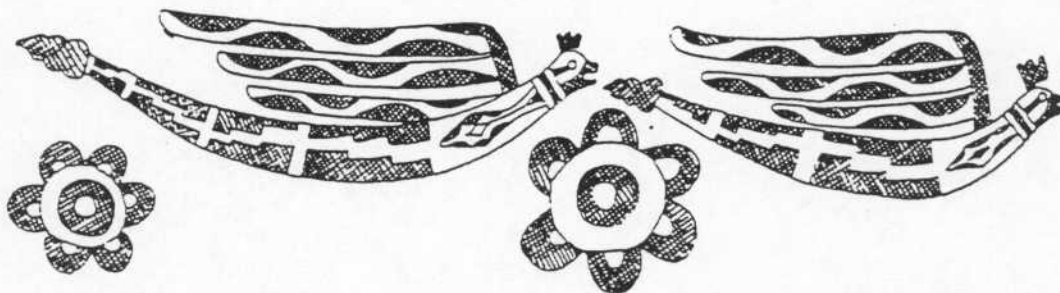


Figure 6.3. Walls "Winged serpent" vessel. From Holmes 1886, figure 412.

The telling differences involve not only differences of motif, but of execution. In no representational engraved pot at Moundville is cross-hatching used so abundantly as an area filler as is shown in figure 6.3. Although figure 6.2 shows a cross-hatched mouth, it is obviously much different from that of

figure 6.3. Also, figure 6.2 has a forked tongue, a motif which a majority of the Moundville "Winged Serpent" theme pots have, occasionally having as many as three or four forks in the tongue. The tongue of the serpent in figure 6.3 is absent. Additionally, the free-floating flowerlike motif on figure 6.3 is utterly unknown at Moundville, as is the diamondlike neck decoration protruding down the body from the neck rings of the snake. The zagging body markings of figure 6.3 are not unusual, but in no case at Moundville are these lines filled with cross-hatching as they are here. The cross-hatched circles on the wing feathers, and cross-hatching treatment of the rattles is likewise completely absent from Moundville engraved art. The cross-hatched wingbar is well-known at Moundville, but almost always carries at least one set of concentric circles, usually at the "elbow" (see figure 6.2).

Figure 6.4, another Walls image, is different from Moundville snakes, but for entirely other reasons.

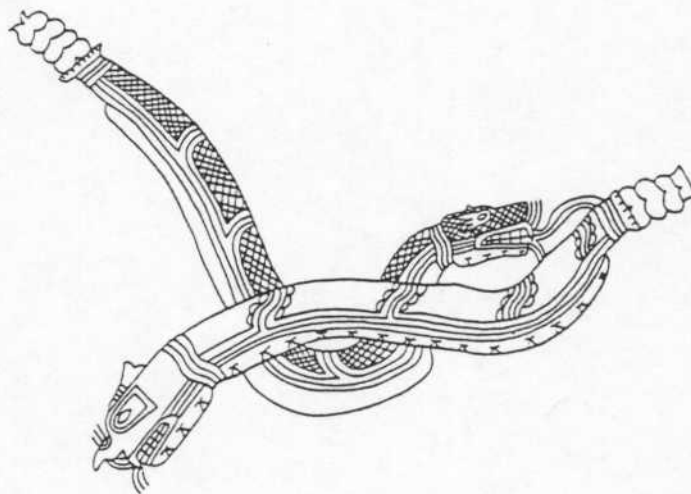


Figure 6.4. Walls snakes. From Phillips and Brown, 1978:200, Figure 261.

This pair of serpents bears more stylistic similarity to the Moundville "Rattlesnake Palette," but since this is a comparison of art engraved on pottery, it shall likewise be compared to figure 6.2, as a typical representation of the "Winged Serpent" theme from Moundville. The dorsal-ventral distinctions of figure 6.4 are not unknown in Moundville engraved art, but the body markings of these two snakes are distinct from anything at Moundville. Although the rattled tails would not be out of place on some of Moundville's more expertly rendered rattlesnakes, the position of the snake bodies, one overlapping the other, distinguishes this representation from any at Moundville. The neckbands of the snakes are where the similarity to Moundville snake heads ends. While some Moundville snakes have teeth, the combination of protruding fangs and grinding teeth are generally not used in the engraved art of the site. Nothing about the snake head on the left has any correlation in Moundville engraved art. The eye-surround of the snake head on the right would not be out of place at Moundville, save that the background is cross-hatched with the surround plain, while at Moundville it would be the reverse. The T-bar representations on the chin of this snake are likewise out of place here. The lines coming from the mouth are not unknown at Moundville, just unusual. If this is meant to be depiction of a tri-forked tongue, it is unlike any which is from Moundville.

The Hollywood bowl is one of the most familiar representations of non-Moundville art which is frequently compared to the Moundville "Winged Serpent" theme. Although, like figure 6.4 above, the depicted creatures are not winged serpents, and the bodies are not aligned according to the Moundville traditions, this image has been used frequently to draw

conclusions about the similarity between Moundville and other sites in regard to their engraved art. Figure 6.5 includes both the Hollywood bowl and another variation from the Georgia Coast. There are similarities between these two representations which may show that if the one is linked to Moundville art, the other ought to be as well. The crowding and overlapping of the snakes is one similarity, the three-lobed eye surround on the human-like faces is another.

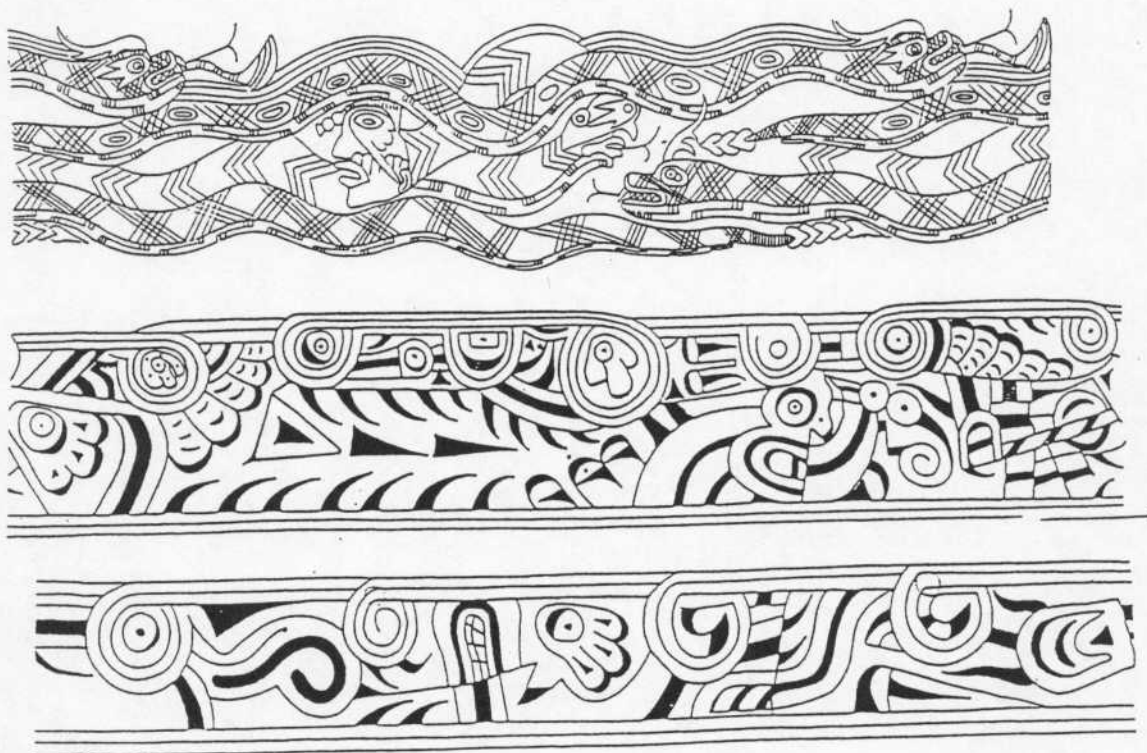


Figure 6.5. Hollywood bowl and Georgia Coastal variant. (Holmes 1903 pl. CXIX.)

The snakes depicted in the upper image of figure 6.4 show teeth and tongues which are within the range of variation which Moundville engraved art encompasses. However, here the neckbands are missing, and once again the eye-surrounds are not crosshatched, while the faces are. The human heads with beaded forelock and face markings are utterly absent from serpent representations at Moundville, though it is an interesting aside that the markings on the humanlike face pointing left are remarkably similar to those found on a much more human representation on engraved shell at Moundville. That irrelevant point aside, the method of depicting rattles, as well as the abrupt end of the ventral side prior to the lines setting off the rattles shows some similarity to the Moundville depiction of these motifs. Also, the ventral body markings would not be out of place at Moundville at all, although the type of dorsal body markings shown are utterly absent from Moundville art.

The Kogers Island phase in the Tennessee Valley of Northern Alabama also shows evidence of ceramics with marked similarities to Moundville Engraved pottery. In this case, representations from Kogers Island and Moundville "trophy" themes will be compared in figure 6.6, below.



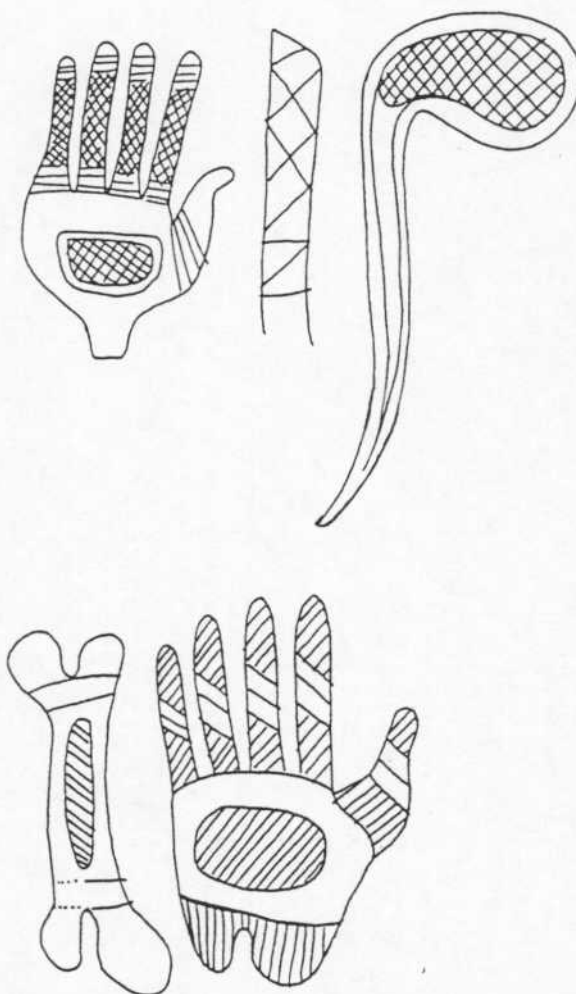


Figure 6.6. Trophy theme from Kogers Island (above, after Webb and DeJarnette 1942, plate 268), and Moundville vessel SWM 15a/M7 (below, after Moore 1907, figure 46).

It is interesting to note that although the hands have many similarities, the Moundville example is not crosshatched, while the Kogers Island example makes liberal use of this technique. In general, Moundville artists used crosshatching sparingly, for a slightly enhancing effect, but not to define positive and negative space. The diagonal lines of the Moundville trophy theme are common within that theme, but in no other at Moundville. That they seem to serve the same effect as the crosshatching from Kogers Island is interesting, to say the least, but of undetermined significance. The two

motifs associated with the hand in the Kogers Island image are not found anywhere in Moundville, neither in the trophy theme nor in any other. Once again, the similarities between the themes of Moundville and another region are striking, but close examination reveals that stylistic differences are observable as well.

Last, but most assuredly not least, are the Pensacola depictions of the "Raptor" theme. Pensacola phase ceramics are found on the north Gulf Coast, which includes the coast of the panhandle of Florida, as well as the coast of Alabama. Although these pots are designated as incised rather than engraved (a distinction based mostly on the width of the line used), they bear the most striking resemblance to Moundville "Raptor" theme vessels. Figure 6.7 shows the typical Moundville "Raptor", while figure 6.8 shows two of the Pensacola variety.



Figure 6.7. Moundville raptor. Vessel SD 362.

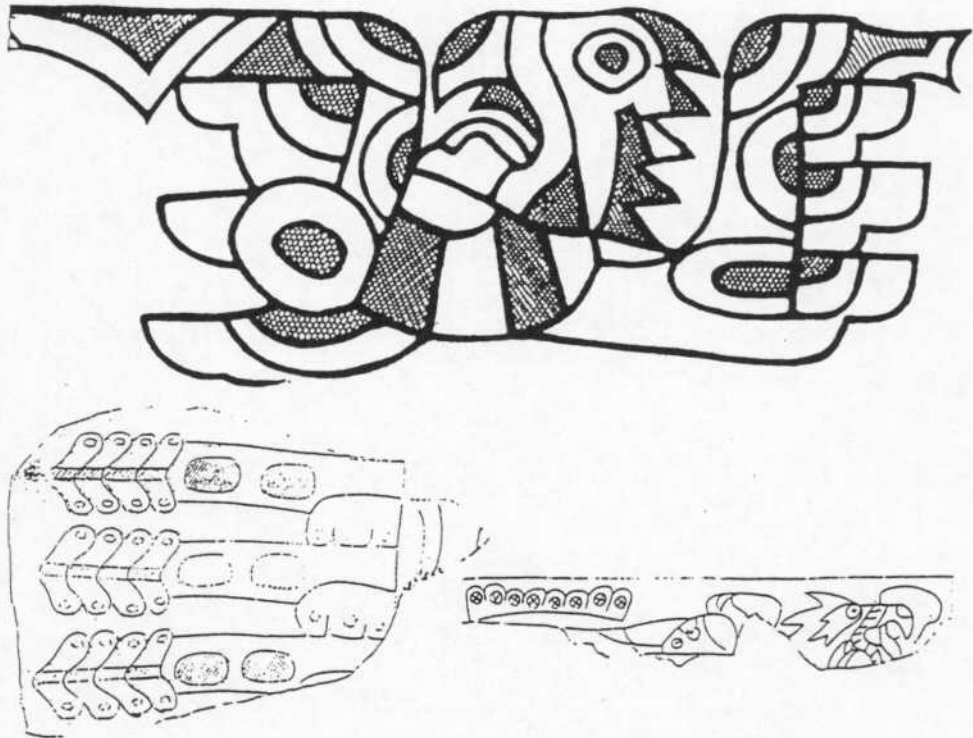


Figure 6.8. Two Pensacola raptors, from Holmes (1903: pl. LVII, LXIX).

In spite of the similarities shown in the other fragments in the lower part of figure 6.8, there are no representations whatsoever of wing feathers terminating in rattles at Moundville. In the upper portion of figure 6.8, there is a pot with a "Raptor" theme on one side and a humanlike head on the other. There is no basis for comparison for this duality, so the raptor shall be treated alone, as there is a basis for comparison with Moundville pottery there. One of the extremely interesting contrasts between this and Moundville "Raptor" depictions is the treatment of the tongue. While the mouth, head, feather crest, eye-surround, beak lining, and spot on the beak are all much like the Moundville representations, the tongue shows a particularly interesting distinction. While Moundville "Raptor" tongues are generally cross-hatched, arrowlike pointed things hanging out of the mouth (see figure 6.9), the

Pensacola representation has a cross-hatched area which makes the same shape in negative space. This negative space is not fully bounded, so it probably is not merely a plain version of the same shape as is found at Moundville, it is meant to be part of the negative space which makes up the background of the pot. Therefore we have essentially the same design, only one uses positive space, the other uses crosshatching to create the effect of negative space. Why this would be is an absolute mystery to this researcher.

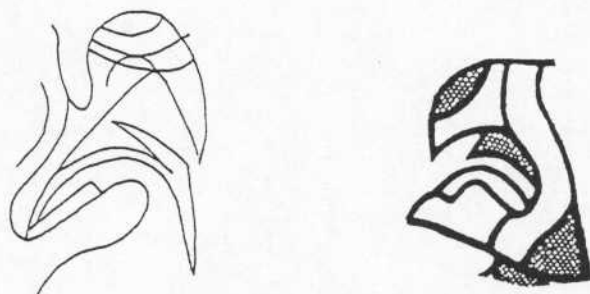


Figure 6.9. Raptor tongue variations. From vessel SD 362 from Moundville, and the Pensacola variation.

Although this comparison is only preliminary, once stylistic analysis has been done for the representational engraved pottery from each of these groups, it may be possible to demonstrate that Moundville style has similarities to each thematically, but not so much stylistically. The themes are recognizable in each of these different groups, but the style of representations seems to differ greatly enough for them to be classified as

different styles. For this assertion to be supported however, additional stylistic analysis of all the available Walls, Pensacola, and Kogers Island engraved or incised representational pottery should be conducted.

This thesis does not attempt to identify individual artists, or even categorize "schools" in the way that Phillips and Brown did (Phillips and Brown 1978). It only seeks to propose a tentative identification of the elements of a Moundville style. A general list of characteristics for the Moundville Engraved, *var. Hemphill* style includes:

1. There is a conservative range of figural depiction.
  - a. U-shaped body for winged serpents.
  - b. Dorsal/ventral distinctions are minor.
  - c. Wing and tail depictions are consistent.
  - d. There are no seriously abstracted or ornate forms.
2. There is sparing use of crosshatching.
  - a. There may be small crosshatched triangles.
  - b. There may be small crosshatched half-circles.
  - c. There may be narrow crosshatched bands.
3. There is little regard for the design field.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Previous Iconographical Identifications of Moundville Images and Iconography of the Crested Bird at Moundville**

Before engaging in the single example of original iconography included in this thesis, a brief synopsis of the identifications which have been given in the past to Moundville Engraved images is in order. Iconography is the study of meaning in art and, as such, should be practiced with great caution when little is known about the context of the art, the artist, and the cultural context in which it was used. Still, identifications of the subjects of Moundville Engraved designs stretch as far back as Moore (Moore 1905), and seldom limit themselves to the practical identification of the creature represented by the image. Many of the interpretations of Moundville Engraved ceramic images revolve around linking them to the myths and traditions of historic Southeastern Indians. Antonio Waring's "The Southern Cult and Muskogean Ceremonial" linked the motifs which he and Preston Holder identified some years earlier with historic Southeastern groups, especially regarding the "sun circle" and "crossed circle" motifs. He put them forth as being associated with sun/fire worship (Waring 1977:34-35). He was followed by James Howard, who readily used his own ethnological studies of Southeastern Indians in tandem with historic ethnologies to set forth interpretations of Southeastern Ceremonial Complex motifs (Howard 1968). He wrote this considerable work with the hopes of furthering the work begun by Waring (1968:18). Before a quick precis of the associations he makes

between historic myths and prehistoric art, I would like to put forth a disclaimer. It is my belief that the fact that assertions of this sort (that historic mythic creatures and ideas can be associated with prehistoric art) are neither provable nor disprovable and rely entirely on the elegance of the argument to be believable makes the practice of linking myths to art suspect at best. Use of myths to interpret prehistoric art is not a part of my iconographical analysis at all, nor shall it be. This is not to denigrate the approach, nor those who have used it in the past, it is merely my personal preference in the matter. Howard first sets forth that the small number of Southern Cult artifacts relative to their geographic distributions indicates that they have "fairly concise definitions" (Howard 1968:19). I would take issue with this, but this thesis is not concerned with this mythography/iconography, so the arguments here shall be brief. Howard associates Moundville and Walls winged serpents with a recent historic beaded sash, but does not explain what the significance of this would be, or even dispel the possibility that there was copying of prehistoric designs from recent literature on the part of the maker of the sash (1968:150-151). He also makes identifications of the historical importance of woodpeckers to Southeastern beliefs without once making reference to the anomalous nature of the birds (1968:45-47). His interpretation of the hand and eye motif is widely varied from a sign of being hit by an enemy to an association with a specific mythical creature to a representation of a gesture of peace, and has no particular support from the artistic representations from Moundville Engraved ceramics (1968:26-34). Phillips and Brown are much more conservative with their iconographic analysis, only tentatively putting forth associations as opposed to taking wild

stabs at possible conventional meanings. Their interpretation of the previous identification of the "sun symbol" is excellent:

It is one of the old "Middle Mississippi" motifs, universally accepted on faith alone as a sun symbol, which makes sun worship a basic component of Southeastern religion. The possibility that it might have different meanings in different situations is not generally considered (Phillips and Brown 1978:195).

Nuttall identified the Etowah "eagle dancers" with Mesoamerican counterparts, which is an astute and artistically supportable assertion. Unfortunately, she didn't stop there, but proceeded to propose that the eagle dancers or warriors were celebrating "a complete victory over a decapitated foe" (Nuttall 1979:138). The problem with this assertion is that even if she is right, there is no way to support or refute her assertion. Lankford associated the Moundville crested bird with myths about thunderbirds (Lankford 1987:78), an assertion equally impossible to prove. These are only a very few of the copious identifications made of Moundville Engraved ceramic images and other Mississippian figures.

All of the data collection and analysis to this point leads to certain interpretations of the crested bird and paired tails themes. Their relation to one another is important, but the interpretation of the implications of that relation is the true iconographic analysis, as well as the most potentially interesting result of this work as far as most people are concerned. Based upon the stylistic seriation, it is reasonable to assume that the more elaborate forms are earlier. Because they are more complex, they are more likely to include information which allows us insight into the potential significance of the images, if not the original meanings. The iconographical analysis of the "Crested bird" theme from Moundville which follows is only a



representative sample of the iconographic analysis which may be practiced on Moundville art. It may be considered indicative rather than all-encompassing.

Earlier interpretations of the Moundville crested bird tended to consider it as a woodpecker, based on the presence of a crest, and on comparison with other representations of woodpeckers in the Southeast. C. B. Moore was the first to give the label "woodpeckers" to the representations of crested birds on the pots he found at Moundville (Moore 1905:137-139), but he was followed by generations of archaeologists who kept his moniker for these birds. Other crested bird representations in the Southeast are more likely to have ivory-billed or pileated woodpeckers for their natural prototypes, foremost among these the Cox style shell gorgets from Tennessee, which depict four crested birds arranged around a looped square. Although the Moundville crested birds bear a certain resemblance to the Cox style representations on shell, they are of a different style and quite likely refer to a variation of the same basic idea. The importance of crested birds to Mississippian religious imagery is evidenced by the large number of representations of this theme within the Southeast. However, there is no more reason to think that all crested birds in all the different regional variations of style have the same natural prototype than to think that all of the different manifestations of Mississippian culture viewed the crested bird the same way. In some styles, such as Cox, the natural prototype of the bird quite likely is a woodpecker. In other areas, such as Moundville, other aspects of crested birdness are just as important.

While I do believe that woodpecker elements are a part of the Moundville manifestation of the crested bird, I feel that it is clear that this is yet another anomalous creature to add to the roster of Mississippian monstrosities. The neck shape and markings are indicative of snakelike attributes. In one case, the rounded beak of a crested bird is adorned with the very same cross-hatched oval which is likely a snake mark. It is certainly not much of a jump to suppose that the tongue device which takes the place of the tongue, or either the bird holds it in its beak, is in fact a beaded forelock, of the type that Southeastern warriors depicted in engraved shell art were wont to wear.

Of equal importance, in the instances where the beak is shown realistically, complete with a nostril, it is most certainly not a woodpecker's beak. In a significant number of cases, the beak is quite deliberately rounded at the tip. The crest itself is another distinguishing feature of the bird. While a pileated woodpecker's crest is generally triangular when raised, the representations of crested birds from Moundville tend to have a short, even crest which more closely resembles the warrior's crest from shell depictions, or else a similar crest with a slightly more woodpeckerlike forward curl. In only one instance is a crest shown to be triangular on the pottery at Moundville, and that is on a bird which is remarkable more generally for its stylistic uniqueness at Moundville. In fact, there are so many stylistic differences between this vessel and every other Moundville example of the crested bird theme that it is possible that it was not locally made. One should compare this to the Cox style representations of woodpeckers which have

distinctly triangular crests. It is quite clear that we are looking at two different things here, which is not to say that the two are unrelated.

In each member of the primary crested bird grouping, the central medallion has some kind of twist. I mean this figuratively, but in many cases, it is also applicable literally.

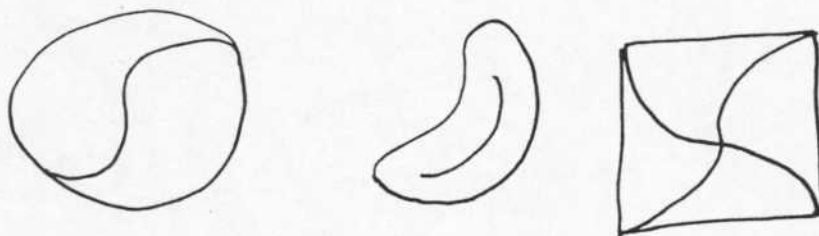


Figure 7.1. Some of the medallions from the primary crested bird grouping.

It is in this grouping that we find the two images which have a physical feature of the pot in place of the central medallion. In each of the other cases within this group, there is a division of the medallion into sections which seem to twist around a central point. In a majority of the cases, it is a simple "s" line, but in one case it is a curvilinear swastika form. I propose that the central medallion in all of these cases is supposed to literally indicate a knot or a wrapping about something. The birds in court card symmetry are supposed to be seen as knotted together. Further down the line in time, this knotted or twisting idea is found as the three fingers motif, which I interpret as "loose ends" radiating from the central medallion, and also as the gently twisted triangles which form the upper tail markings of a majority of the latest group of crested birds. The immediate question is: Wrapped around what?

As there are no clear answers to this question at Moundville, it is time to turn to representations of crested birds from other regions. It is also

necessary to change media, and by the same token, to change styles. To this end, our consideration of crested birds will now encompass the Cox style gorgets and Spiro shell engravings.

While earlier Moundville crested birds are believed to be more elaborate and more literal than the later, conventionalized versions of the same theme at Moundville, Spiro shell engravings which depict the theme from a different view are even more literal than any of the Moundville representations. In the Craig school, phase A, there are two images which incorporate what might well be the bird, but definitely possessing the wrapping and knotting, and the loose ends, all within the same composition (see figure 7.2).

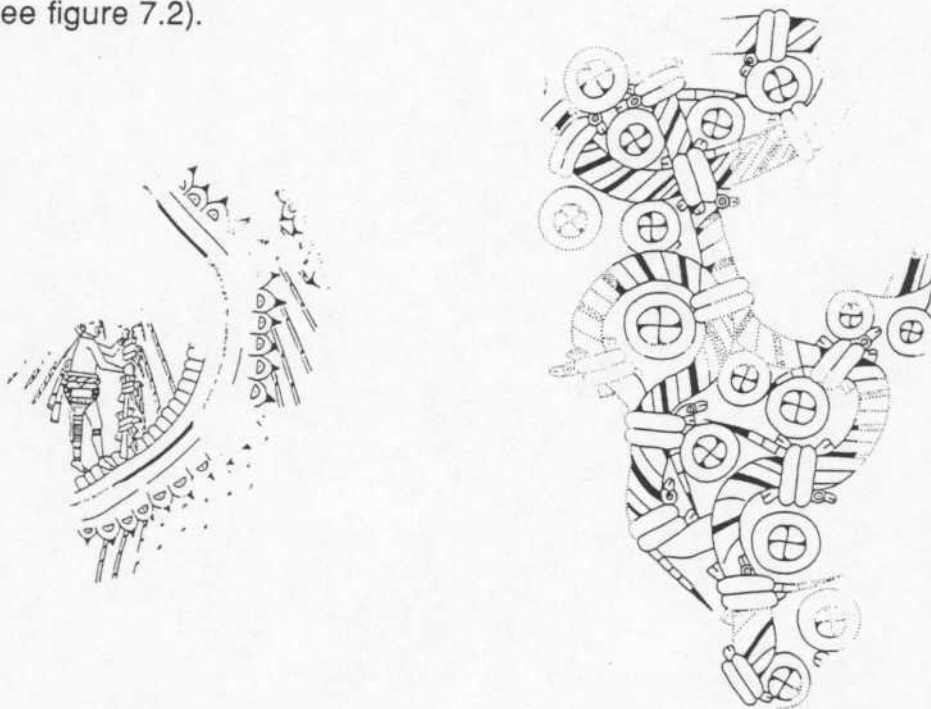


Figure 7.2. Wrapped animals from shell cup from Spiro (Phillips and Brown 1984:164, 167).

By virtue of this side view, we may understand a little better what the Moundville crested "bird's eye view" represents. While the Spiro depictions

make no visual reference to the crested nature of the bird, it is nevertheless clear from the representation of the wrapped nature of the birds, and the loose ends sticking out, that this is indeed the same theme as the Moundville engraved crested bird. The birds are in fact tied onto a striped pole, and the Moundville "court card" show this as a knotted medallion, seen from a birds eye view.

In spite of what was said earlier about the Cox style crested birds being woodpeckers, while the Moundville crested birds are something else, there is reason to believe that both of these representations occupy the same niche within each groups artistic representational system. In Cox style representations, the woodpecker heads are attached to a looped square, which quite likely bears the same iconographic position as the striped pole.



Figure 7.3. Cox style gorget, after Muller (Muller 1989:22).

Both the loops in the Cox representation and the twisting of the Moundville engraved crested bird representation could indicate motion.

Now that there is a suggestion of iconographic similarity between the Craig A, Cox, and Moundville engraved versions of the bird binding/crested bird theme, we may bring in some of the "spin-offs" of this theme, which I believe have the same intended meaning. As conventionalization increases, the tendency is to render a meaningful image shorthand, keeping important references, but either stylizing or dropping nonessential elements. In the case of Moundville engraved pottery, a shorthand element (*pars pro toto*) of this theme seems to be radial fingers, which represent/take the place of the loose ends, as mentioned before. Also used, but with somewhat less frequency, is an image of bound fingers, where a series of parallel lines bisects a pair of sets of fingers. Both of these shorthand versions appear in a variety of circumstances in Moundville pottery designs, and show that the crested bird theme has greater importance than is at first obvious.

This is but a short foray into the realm of iconography made possible by stylistic analysis. It should be made plain that this analysis is concerned with representation, but not the belief system underlying the symbols. The application of ethnographic analogy to explain what role the striped pole played in the cosmology of the Moundville people requires not only a satisfactory grasp of the materials in question, but also the ability to know exactly how far an analogy may be carried toward the explanation of the symbolic representation of a theme or motif. The next chapter contains the suggestions and which the future researcher should take into account when applying ethnographic analogy to stylistic analysis. It also presents

guidelines for stylistic research which hopefully will prove productive for the application of ethnographic analogy to stylistic analysis to gain a richer, yet solidly supported understanding of Mississippian artistic/religious traditions.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was an attempt to make a contribution to the understanding of Mississippian art, and its role in the society which made it. By establishing a firm footing in stylistic analysis, the conclusions made by using ethnographic analogy in regard to these images will hopefully be more coherent and more precise. The stylistic analysis of Moundville engraved art is but one step in this process. Each Mississippian regional culture ought to have the same care applied to the assessment of the stylistic component of its art before forays into the realm of interpretation should be attempted. Once more Mississippian groups have as much information about style as Spiro (Phillips and Brown 1978), it will be far more productive to look for stylistic and thematic comparisons between different Mississippian groups in different times and parts of the Southeast.

That there is a Moundville style seems clear, based on evidence from Moundville pottery as well as comparison to representations from other sites. That Moundville style undergoes change through time seems clear as well, though a more precise understanding of this requires further exploration of the statistical analysis of stylistic information. It is the hope of this researcher that such stylistic analysis will continue, and be applied to prehistoric art throughout the Mississippian Southeast and beyond, for it is only with this stylistic basis that further research into the iconography of Mississippian cultures can proceed.



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