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## THE MOUNDVILLE CULTURE AND ITS DISTRIBUTION

Moundville is located twenty miles southwest of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on the bluff above a great bend in the Black Warrior River. Here on a level plain are the remains of a large village site, several small artificial lakes, thirty-four truncated pyramidal mounds and several smaller incipient mounds.

Clarence B. Moore made in 1905 and 1906 the first excavations of any magnitude at Moundville. In 1929 the Alabama Museum of Natural History began excavating and have carried on a more or less continuous program over the last ten years.

The mounds are medium to large truncated pyramids with the tops square or rectangular. Some of these mounds show traces of ramps of earth. The primary purpose of these mounds was domiciliary or ceremonial, as superficial excavation has yielded few burials but numerous post-mold patterns on the summit of these structures. In the village site that surrounds and lies between all the mounds are the remains of rectangular post-mold patterns similar to those found on the mound platforms.

The burial complex consisted of extended flesh burials, usually on the back in shallow pits. Grave furniture of shell-tempered pottery, stone discs, clay pipes, shell beads, copper-on-wood earspools are abundant. There is no evidence of any orientation, as burials are intruded without regard to any previous burials or the cardinal directions of the compass.

Although C. B. Moore thought the pottery complex of Moundville plain and uninteresting, it is surprisingly rich both in form and decoration. The water bottle, the bowl, the pot, the shallow dish, and many effigy forms, both animal and human, occur in abundance. There are two wares, both shell tempered; a coarse, heavy ware that has been described as "domestic ware" and is found mainly strewn about the village site, and a fine, polished, and often engraved ware that occurs mainly in the burial pits. A study of a surface collection of over 13,000 sherds showed only twenty-eight sherds that were not shell tempered.

The most characteristic objects of stone are the circular notch palettes of sandstone. In addition to these there are greenstone celts, elbow pipes, discoidals, stone gorgets, and projectile points. The burial pits contain numerous examples of the small triangular point commonly known as "Mississippian". Beside these only a couple of hundred of projectile points have been found in all the excavating that has been done at the site. These last are heavy and crude and show much less technique.

The only metal found on the site is native copper which has been hammered into thin sheets and applied over wood, stone, or bone to make ornate objects. Copper earspools made in this manner are common. Copper pendants and hairpins occur; also copper fishhooks without barbs.

This brief and incomplete picture of the Moundville Culture is presented as background for a paper by Dr. Charles Snow on the physical anthropology of Moundville. There is no evidence of historic contact at Moundville. Among the problems that present themselves are three: (1) Was Moundville a homogeneous culture? (2) If not, what evidence is there of contact with other aboriginal peoples, and (3) Is there stratigraphy at Moundville?

The first of these problems will be dealt with in Dr. Snow's paper. There is a suggestion of contact with the Caddoan people of Arkansas in the pottery found at Moundville; recent excavations along the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama indicate Moundville influence had reached certain sites in that region. Excavation at Moundville has yielded no evidence of stratigraphy to date.

-18-

All evidence indicates a culture that arose rapidly to a position of great power and magnificence, flourished for a time, and declined as rapidly as it arose.

J. Russell Foster

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