

Preface to the New Edition

AT THIS WRITING, thirteen years have passed since the 1993 Society for American Archaeology symposium that spawned the papers included in this volume. That symposium represented a significant break with previous syntheses of Moundville prehistory. In large measure, it had to do with realizing the full implications of an internal chronology introduced some years earlier. Among the chief insights resulting from this chronology was our growing awareness of two significant transitions in Moundville's historical trajectory. The first was the regional consolidation of the polity, which had the character of an event concurrent with the layout of the plaza, the major mounds, and the palisade. The second was the shift from a bustling, fortified town in the thirteenth century AD to a very dissimilar, vacant ceremonial center and necropolis in the fourteenth century.

In different ways, these conclusions had dawned on us by the late 1980s. One of us (VPS) had realized that the middens at Moundville were mostly early but the burials were mostly late. Thus the majority of people buried at Moundville could not actually have lived there. The other (VJK) had realized that only one of the mounds along the southern margin of Moundville's plaza was still occupied in the later part of the sequence. Thus mound building on the plaza periphery was early, but the site was partially abandoned later on. A new history

of Moundville had to be written incorporating these insights. This history was realized in our introductory chapter, in which we decided to use the word “necropolis” for the first time in recognition of the fact that Moundville’s late-period cemeteries were larger and more numerous than those of other large Mississippian centers. Our various collaborators were also busy employing new diachronic perspectives to shed light on other aspects of the Moundville chiefdom. In retrospect, given that Moundville archaeology is such an active scene, we think the book has held up pretty well, as the basic model it presents is still widely accepted.

Naturally, there have been advances since 1993 on several topics addressed in this book. For one thing, radiometric dates have accumulated rapidly. We have since decided to adopt a tree-ring calibrated phase chronology. The effect has been to collapse the Moundville sequence into a shorter span of calendric time than is given in Chapter 1. Following the results of an analysis by Knight, Lyle Konigsberg, and Susan Frankenberg (1999), the revised calendar ages of the phases are as follows:

West Jefferson phase	AD 1020–1120
Moundville I phase	AD 1120–1260
Moundville II phase	AD 1260–1400
Moundville III phase	AD 1400–1520
Moundville IV phase	AD 1520–1650

Our notion that Moundville was in some sense a planned community and that most of the mound construction there took place during a brief interval in the late Moundville I and early Moundville II phases is implicit in Chapters 1–3. We now have a bit more actual evidence of this construction chronology than we did at the time. From 1989 to 1998, Knight conducted new excavations in six mounds and obtained some 57 new radiocarbon dates bearing on episodes of mound construction. In that project, summit architecture was exposed on two mounds, and the contents of flank middens provided new data on elite activities. These topics have been explored in articles prepared by Knight (2004), Ed Jackson and Susan Scott (2003), and Julie Markin (1997), and in theses prepared by University of Alabama graduate students Elizabeth Ryba (1995), Robyn Astin (1996), Kristi Taft (1996), and Matthew Gage (2000). The idea that residential space at Moundville may have been formally partitioned at some point, as

suggested in Chapter 3, served as a point of reference for a new study of household evidence at Moundville in a dissertation by University of North Carolina graduate student Greg Wilson (2005).

In the original symposium it was Paul Welch's assignment to provide a summary of the outlying settlements, a topic to which he had personally contributed the lion's share of the evidence with his work at the various single-mound centers. In a paper that became Chapter 8, Lauren Michals added a rare glimpse of a non-mound settlement belonging to the earliest part of the sequence. But one of the gaps in our picture of Moundville's hinterland was the lack of a good characterization of the numerous non-mound sites and their role in Moundville's rise, florescence, and decline. Fortunately a new generation has tackled this topic headlong, with important studies produced by University of North Carolina graduate student Mintcy Maxham (2000, 2004) and University of Alabama graduate students Scott Hammerstedt (2000), Jennifer Myer (2002), and Paul Jackson (2004). Mark Rees (2001) has conducted additional excavations at two of the single-mound sites as reported in his dissertation at the University of Oklahoma.

We are proud to say that Moundville research continues at a brisk pace. At this writing, John Blitz and his students have launched the Early Moundville Archaeological Project, which explores the idea that early differences in access to resources at the household level lies behind the emergence of social ranking that is so strongly marked later on. And the curated collections from former excavations continue to beckon. The future of Moundville research looks good from here.

VJK & VPS
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