

## MOUNDVILLE

Moundville, located on the Black Warrior River in west-central Alabama, is among the largest Mississippian civic-ceremonial centers ever built. Today, its most visible features are twenty large, pyramidal earthen mounds arranged around a rectangular plaza. These mounds served as platforms for important buildings, such as clan houses and the residences of chiefs. The largest earthwork is fifty-six feet (17 m) high. At one time, the site was fortified with a stockade that enclosed an area of some 200 acres (80 ha).

Because of its impressive size, Moundville has long attracted archaeological interest. In 1869 and 1883, the site was visited and mapped by agents of the Smithsonian Institution. Later, in 1905 and 1906, the site was excavated by Clarence B. Moore, who placed "test holes" in virtually every one of the mounds; he found a spectacular collection of copper and shell ornaments, stone implements, and pottery vessels—many bearing an elaborate iconography. Later still, from 1927 through 1941, large-scale excavations were carried out by the Alabama Museum of Natural History and the Civilian Conservation Corps; these excavations uncovered dozens of house patterns, thousands of burials, and innumerable artifacts. Since the 1940s, archaeologists have focused on interpreting the collections from these early excavations and have carried out a number of new digs to recover stratigraphic and dietary information that was missed in the earlier work.

Based on this research, the broad outlines of the site's history can be sketched. Starting at about AD 1100, Moundville comprised an aggregation of farmsteads with at least one mound of modest size. It was, at most, a local center. At about AD 1200, this community became the region's paramount center. The plaza was laid out and its surrounding mounds were built; Moundville was turned into a thriving, fortified town with perhaps as many as 1,000 residents. At around AD 1300, many of its inhabitants were moved to outlying settlements, leaving only an elite contingent of chiefs, priests, and their retainers. Even so, Moundville's importance remained intact,

as people throughout the region were buried in its cemeteries, often accompanied by pottery decorated with images of the afterlife. The center declined after 1450 and was virtually abandoned by 1550. At its height, Moundville was the political and religious capital of a large chiefdom, supported by an economy based on agriculture, trade, and tribute; although the mechanisms are not fully understood, Moundville's rise and fall were clearly linked to this chiefdom's political fortunes.

Today, the site is well preserved and maintained as a public park by the Alabama Museum of Natural History.

[See also Mississippian Culture; Mounds of Eastern North America; North America: The Eastern Woodlands and the South.]

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### MULTIMEDIA APPLICATIONS

The intersection of multimedia technology and archaeology has resulted in numerous applications that have primarily been designed and developed to present the wonders of archaeological research and interpretations of the past to the broad public. Multimedia applications based on archaeological or historical content have at most a three-decade-long history, which started with presentations for the

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