

Late Prehistoric Social Dynamics in the Northern Yazoo Basin

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Introduction

Over the last century, archaeologists working in the Lower Mississippi Valley have identified and attempted to resolve a number of research questions spanning the prehistoric and protohistoric periods. In the northern Yazoo Basin of northwest Mississippi, researchers have been most concerned with two: the origins and development of Mississippian culture within the region, perhaps beginning as early as the 11th century A.D., and the location and nature of the societies encountered by the De Soto *entrada* in the spring of 1541. Archaeological evidence indicates that the intervening centuries were a time of dynamic cultural change within the region, a result of the unique combination of persistent local traditions and the introduction of, resistance to, and adoption of materials and ideas from outside the region. In this work I present a case study that illustrates how “Mississippian” is expressed over a particular period of time and in a particular place, namely at the Parchman Place site of Coahoma County, Mississippi, a late prehistoric mound site located in the northern Yazoo Basin (Figure 1). In addition to describing a chronological sequence of events, I discuss the history of the Parchman site in terms of the lives of the people who lived there some 50-100 years before De Soto and his men made their way into the valley.

The De Soto chronicles paint a vivid picture of native life in the Yazoo Basin near the climax of the Mississippi period, often described as a cultural “florescence” in the region (Phillips et al 1951; Williams and Brain 1983). The chroniclers describe chiefdom-type hierarchical political arrangements in which the province of Quizquiz, comprising multiple towns and thousands of people, was nonetheless subject to the “lord” of Pacaha, a province on the opposite side of the Mississippi River in present day eastern



Figure 1. Yazoo Basin with Parchman Place (22CO511) indicated. From Phillips et al. 1951: Figure 1.

Arkansas. De Soto's men were largely concerned with acquiring provisions and overcoming military resistance and so inform us of the abundance of maize and other agricultural surpluses available within the province, as well as the formidable military prowess of the native warriors. De Soto's personal secretary writes:

On the other side of the river, about seven thousand Indians had got together, with about two hundred canoes to defend the passage. All of them had strong shields made of canes joined, so strong and so closely interwoven that a cross-bow could hardly pierce them. The arrows came raining down so that the air was full of them, and their yells were something fearful (Bourne 1904:137-138; quoted in Brain 1988:289).

The chroniclers also mention the presence of large man-made earthen mounds, and Brain (1988:291-292) points out the highly centralized political organization that would have been required to marshal such a number of laborers for mound construction on the one hand, and of warriors for military purposes on the other. Unfortunately, the Spaniards left very little in the way of an archaeological trace, and their own descriptions are insufficient in themselves for allowing us to reconstruct the expedition's exact route through the area. Not for lack of effort. A number of theories have been proposed for the archaeological identification of the province of Quizquiz and the location where De Soto and his men crossed the mighty Mississippi River (Swanton 1939; Phillips et al. 1951; Brain 1988; Morse and Morse 1982; Hudson 1997; Weinstein 1985). Two of these theories (Swanton's and Brain's) would place the province of Quizquiz in the modern day county of Coahoma, Mississippi, also home of the late prehistoric Parchman archaeological phase, to which we will return presently. McNutt (1996:242) notes "if any of the various equations between archaeological phases and de Soto's 'provinces' are

correct, we are offered rare insights into our archaeological constructs by the expedition journals.” He goes on to characterize this as a “mixed blessing, however, in that much effort has been expended on debating the exact route of de Soto, and this may have detracted somewhat from efforts to refine the various developmental stages of the phases involved.” I myself have expended quite enough effort on the De Soto expedition in this introduction, merely to illustrate the nature of *some* of the cultural dynamics that were observed among people living in the northern Yazoo Basin in the mid 16th century. I will now turn to the other problem that has captured the attention of archaeologists working in the Yazoo Basin and beyond: the origins and development of the Mississippian culture(s) observed in one of no doubt many manifestations by De Soto and his men.

Generally speaking, Mississippi period (ca. A.D. 1000-1541) sites in the Yazoo Basin exhibit certain elements that suggest the continuity of cultural traditions with deep roots in the area. These elements include site plans consisting of one or more earthen mounds surrounding a central plaza that first appeared in the earlier (Late Woodland) Baytown (ca. A.D 400-1000) period, and certain decorative elements on ceramic vessels, such as incisions, punctations, and red-slipping (Phillips et al. 1951). Maize agriculture, which becomes increasingly important throughout the Mississippi period, is also thought to have local roots in the area (Williams and Brain 1983:404; McNutt 1996:237). These elements, and others, become increasingly elaborated and transformed throughout the next several centuries: multi-mound ceremonial sites tend to become dominated by one large mound supporting one or more ceremonial structures, population density increases and settlements become more nucleated, reliance on maize agriculture increases, and changes in material culture, such as shell-tempering of pottery and changes in vessel form

and decoration occur. Nearly all authors point to northern origins for the introduction of these elements into the region; persistent contenders are southeast Missouri, eastern Arkansas, and the American Bottom region of Illinois (Phillips et al. 1951; Phillips 1970; Morse and Morse 1982; Williams and Brain 1983; Brain 1988; McNutt 1996). Phillips, Ford, and Griffin, however, downplay the possibility of a single origin of Mississippian culture: “We envisage rather a number of centers in which this culture was developing more or less simultaneously along parallel lines with continuing interaction between them” (Phillips et al. 1951:451). In fact, increased interaction with groups within and outside the region is indicated in the archaeological record, although there is much debate concerning the nature of that interaction, with various authors giving more or less weight to mechanisms of diffusion, trade, and migration (Phillips et al. 1951; Williams and Brain 1983; McNutt 1996; Pauketat and Alt 2003).

Thus, a somewhat murky picture emerges of what Mississippian cultures were like in this part of the world: late prehistoric societies characterized by reliance on maize agriculture, hierarchical political organization, platform mound ceremonialism, and a distinctive set of material goods, most notably shell-tempered pottery with distinctive vessel forms and design motifs. This limited characterization accords well with basic definitions of Mississippian societies elsewhere in the southeastern United States. However, I concur with Brain (1988:266), who points out that “lumping together under this general rubric the nuances observed in the archaeological patternings does little to define or explicate the dynamics of the situation.” Indeed.

Recently, many researchers have questioned the utility of such a project, arguing that unacknowledged assumptions surrounding concepts such as “chiefdom societies”

and even “Mississippian” itself may inhibit the recognition that “southeastern peoples had histories that mattered” (Pauketat 2005:53). A recent example of this is Knight’s characterization of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex as “antithetical to a much more fruitful picture of distinctive regional complexes of art and iconography, rooted in regionally different ethnolinguistic settings and responsive to local political and religious developments” (Knight 2005:43). It seems that archaeologists working in the Southeast are beginning to understand that the complexity and diversity of the prehistoric societies we call “Mississippian” can and should be examined in the context of specific historical trajectories (Scarry 1996:19). Nowhere is this more true than in the Yazoo Basin, whose complex prehistory is as yet little understood.

With this goal in mind, I focus on recent archaeological investigations at Parchman Place, a late prehistoric site in the northern Yazoo Basin of northwest Mississippi. At first glance, the site consists of several elements that might be considered “typical” of Mississippian ceremonial sites. Namely, the site consists of a large platform mound (Mound A), and two or more smaller mounds, as well as the presence of what is thought to be an earlier village occupation to the south of the mound group. In particular, my work focuses on the results of excavations on one of the small mounds at the site, and incorporates evidence from mound stratigraphy, radiocarbon dates, and ceramic analysis to aid in interpretations. I address the duration, disruption, and cyclicity of mound construction at Parchman in terms of the social and political actions of the individuals and groups who lived there. These actions indicate, among other things, that mound building practices at Parchman were anything but “typical.” Before turning to this analysis a discussion of previous work in the region is in order.

Background and previous work

Indisputably, the most influential work carried out in the Lower Mississippi Valley (LMV) to date is that of Philip Phillips, James A. Ford, and James B. Griffin, who surveyed the Yazoo Basin in the 1940s as part of the Lower Mississippi Survey (LMS) (Phillips et al. 1951:ix). The importance of this work to our current understanding of the region can hardly be overstated. Although no excavations were carried out at Parchman Place, Ford and Griffin visited the site in April of 1940 to make surface collections and to survey and map the site (Figure 2). They noted that Parchman “exhibits a well-defined plaza arrangement dominated by a large platform mound of uncertain shape, about 60m in diameter at the base and 6 or 7 meters high” (Phillips et al. 1951:372; Steponaitis et al.

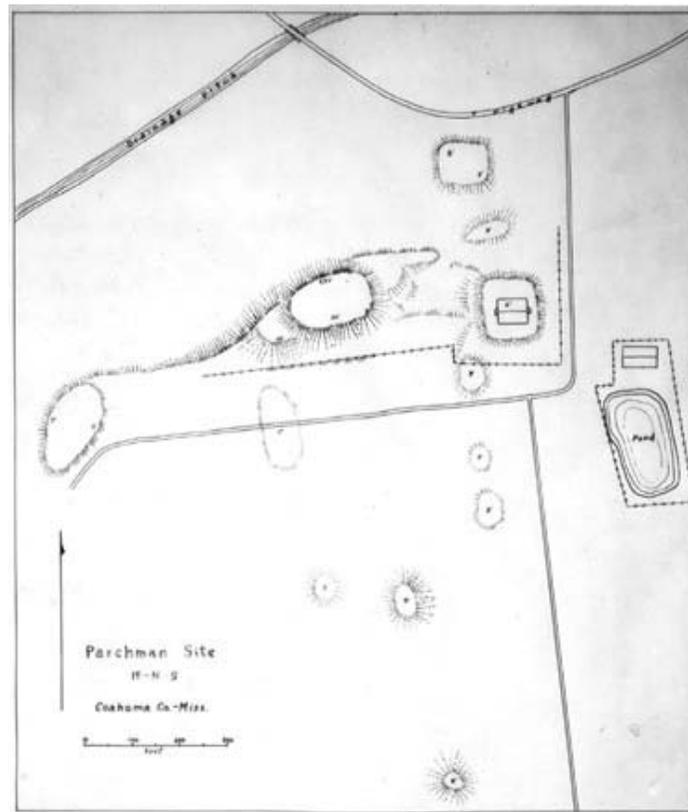


Figure 2. Ford and Griffin’s 1940 sketch map of Parchman Place (15-N-5).

2002). Surface collections from Parchman and other sites visited by Phillips, Ford, and Griffin remain the primary basis for our understanding of the culture history of the Lower Valley and the Yazoo Basin even today. The results of the survey were published in the monumental work, *Archaeological Survey in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley, 1940-1947* (1951). Based on ceramic seriation, Phillips, Ford, and Griffin placed Parchman Place late in their “B-A” or Late through Terminal Mississippian period (Phillips et al 1951:51).

Phillips (1970) later put together a culture history framework for the LMV, in which the late prehistory of the region was divided into the Baytown (A.D. 400-700), Coles Creek (A.D. 700-1000), and Mississippi (A.D. 1000-contact) periods, with the latter corresponding, of course, to what is commonly known as the Mississippian cultural tradition (Kidder 1998:125). Going much further than that, however, Phillips, employing his “type-variety” system, utilized ceramic complexes to define archaeological phases for the region, which “recast the culture history of the entire valley into a detailed series of regional chronologies, providing the means for correlating events in the archaeological record and asking questions about development, interaction, and process” (Brain 1988:49). Phillips grouped Parchman Place, along with the Carson, Salomon, Dundee, and West sites into a tentative Parchman phase, which will be discussed in more detail below. Limited archaeological work was done at Parchman Place in the decades following the LMS, although additional surface collections were made by Ian Brown (1977) and by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Starr 1984).

Beginning in 2002, however, intensive investigation resumed at Parchman Place. Jay Johnson has undertaken a large-scale program of survey and excavation at the site, utilizing shallow geophysics to determine site formation patterns and to guide excavations. The 2002 field season focused on conducting multi-sensor geophysical and remote sensing surveys utilizing magnetic gradiometry, electrical resistivity, ground penetrating radar, magnetic susceptibility, and various airborne methods. Partial results from this survey can be seen in Figure 3. The image shows several house features in the

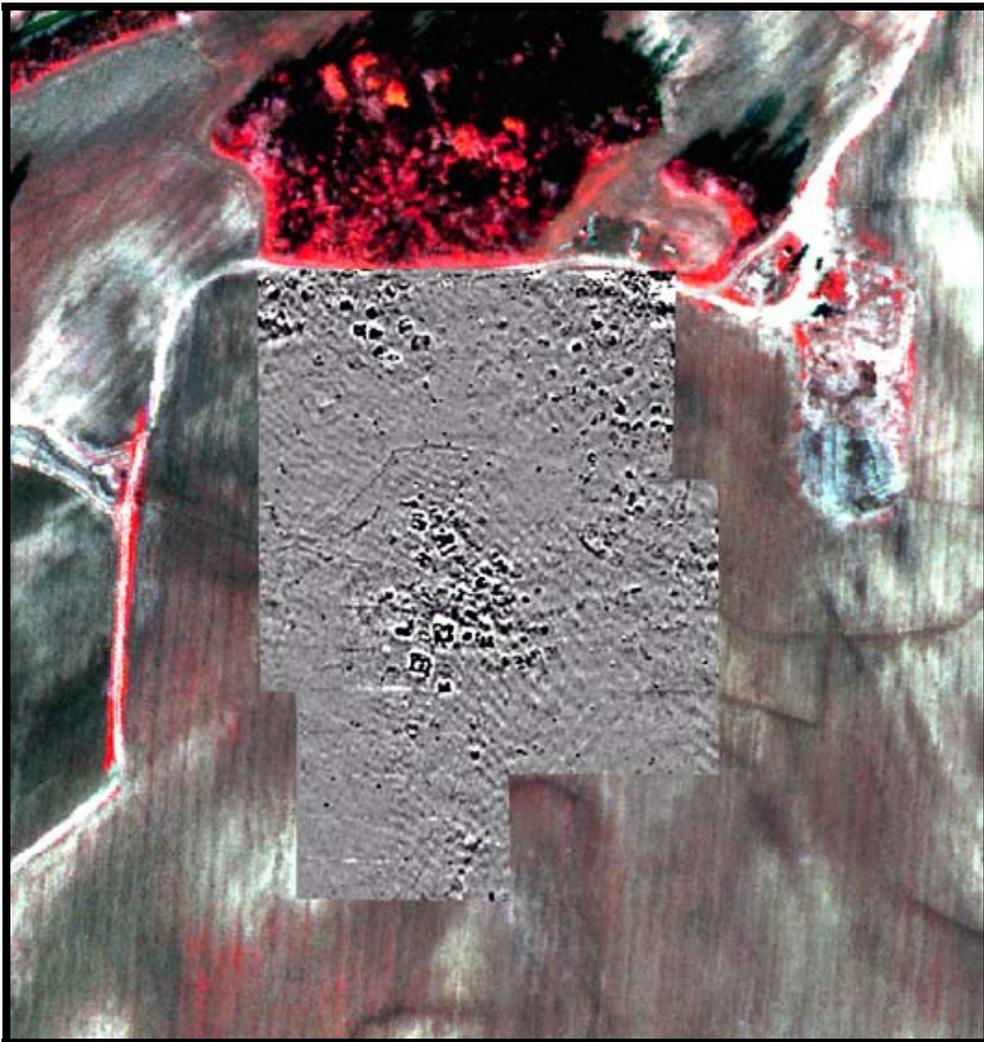


Figure 3. False color infrared image of Parchman with overlay of gradiometer results. Mound A, located near the top of the image, is covered in trees.

plaza area of the site, many of which correspond to daub concentrations evident on the ground surface. In addition to geophysical survey, field school students opened up several test excavation squares in the plaza area to the south of Mound A, revealing the remains of three structures and a large pit. The most informative of the excavations revealed a sequence of at least two house structures, one of which was burned and then buried under a low mound on top of which the second house was built. The first house was a wall trench structure with wattle and daub construction, wooden roof support beams, a thatch roof, and an interior clay hearth.

In 2003, excavations focused on Mound A and the surrounding smaller mounds. In particular, the gradiometer data indicated a large (ca. 8 x 10 m) rectangular structure with a strong magnetic signature located on the west side slope of Mound A, on the surface of the contiguous smaller mound (Figure 4). This was chosen as a desirable location for excavation because of its potential ability to produce information about mound-top structures and to delineate the stratigraphic relationship between Mound A and the smaller mound. Results of the 2003 excavation revealed the remains of at least three structures and what was initially interpreted as a “burned” mound surface. Additionally, excavators discovered that the smaller mound was in use prior to the construction of Mound A, and that its use continued after the building of Mound A commenced. The following summer, excavators expanded the trench in order to resolve the many issues raised in the initial field season. As a result of the 2002-2005 excavations, as well as previous work, we now have a general understanding of the cultural sequence at Parchman.

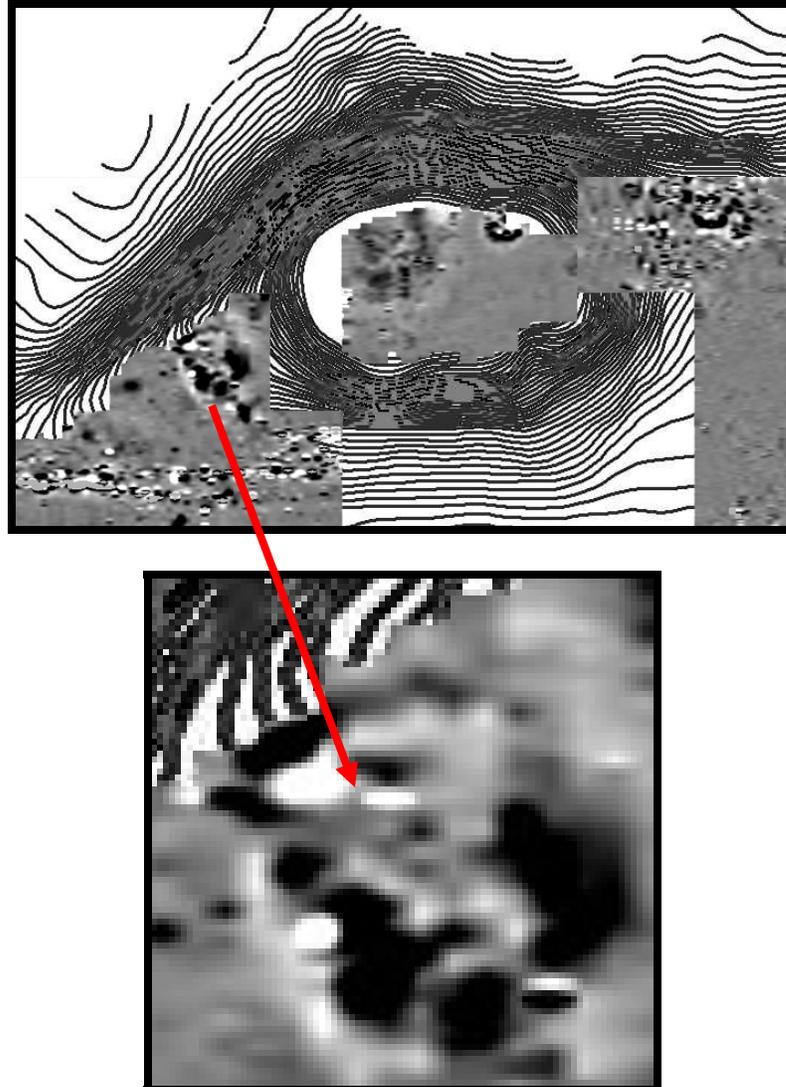


Figure 4. Mound top structure located by magnetic gradiometry.

Geophysical exploration and excavations at Parchman suggest that the site has at least three phases of occupation, beginning with the village portion of the site, which consists of a large number of house structures in what has tentatively been called the “plaza” area. Many of these structures were built on natural or constructed rises, elevating them slightly above the surrounding landscape. At some point, at least two, and very likely more, small mounds were constructed at the site, possibly incorporating a

portion of the earlier constructions. This series of small mounds is located to the north of the bulk of earlier constructions and skirts the edge of what was presumably an oxbow lake. The small mounds also served as platforms for structures, whose size and location suggest special activities. Midden deposits on the slopes of these mounds indicate at least some of these activities were domestic (Johnson 2003:4). Finally, at some later point, one and possibly more of the small mounds were incorporated in the construction of Mound A, the largest mound at the site (Figure 5). Two structures have been

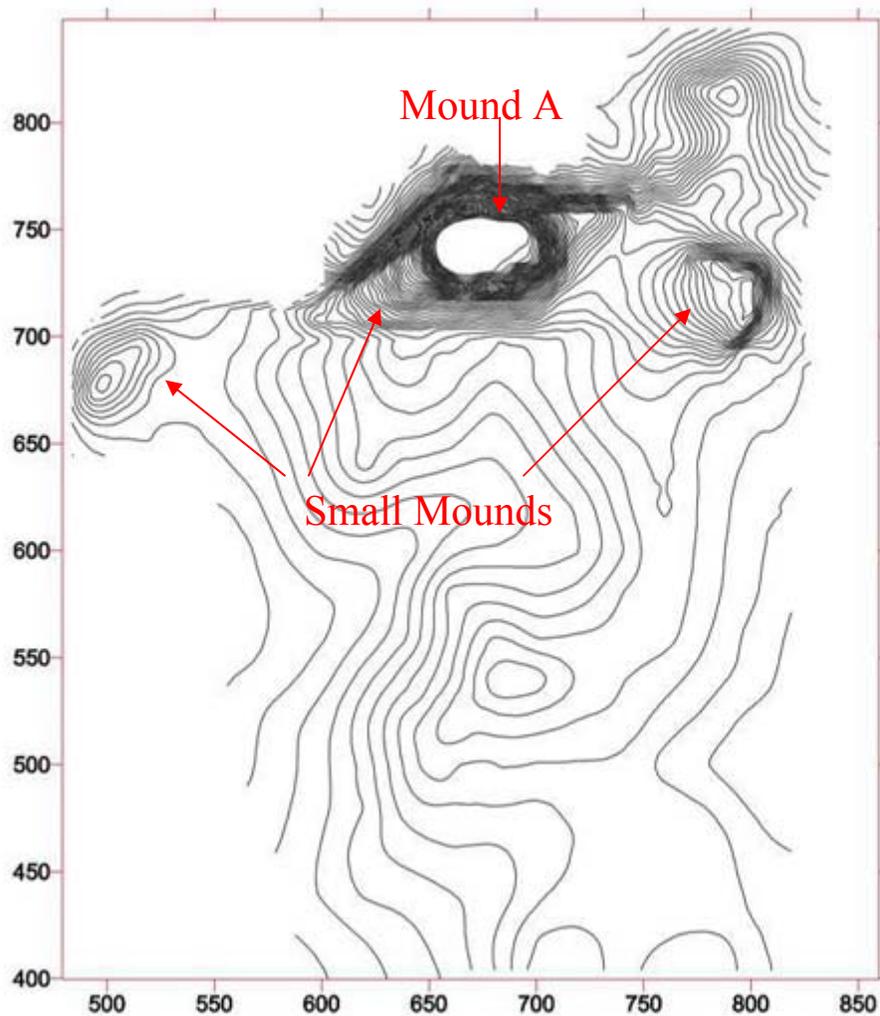


Figure 5. Topographic map of Parchman showing Mound A and three smaller mounds.

confirmed by excavation on top of the Mound A platform. Johnson (2003:5) has proposed, on the basis of comparisons with the Hollywood site, that after the paramount mound was built, the smaller mounds continued to be used in what may have been subordinate ritual activity. Whether or not this is true, the sequence of mound building activity outlined here and detailed below indicates the potential for social elements represented by platform mounds at Parchman to be organized in multiple ways. The following sections discuss mound stratigraphy, as well as the results of ceramic analysis and radiocarbon dating for mound excavations at Parchman.

Why Mound Stratigraphy?

The stratigraphic sequence at Parchman indicates that mound building proceeded according to different rules and goals at different times in its history. Specifically, differences in the duration and cyclicality of individual building episodes and the disruption of the mound building process itself reveal insights into the social and political implications of mound construction at the site. The evidence suggests that mound building traditions at Parchman were malleable and that individuals or groups of people manipulated or otherwise adapted their mound building practices to suit their changing circumstances.

Blitz and Livingood (2004:291) discuss two alternative interpretations of the “sociopolitical implications of mound building.” One leading interpretation suggests that the overall size and/or volume of an individual mound reflects the duration of the mound’s use, something akin to Hally’s (1996) argument that “the duration of platform mound construction and use coincided with the duration of the chiefly polity that used the

mound” (Blitz and Livingood 2004:292). Blitz and Livingood, however, maintain that much of the variation observed in mound volume must be attributed to factors other than duration of use, including the ability of individual chiefs to acquire and coordinate labor (Blitz and Livingood 2004:299). Therefore, differences in mound size (and by implication, differences in size or thickness of mound additions) are not simply a matter of time, but are a reflection of power.

Knight (1986:678-680) gives an alternative interpretation of mound building, suggesting that mounds are “fundamentally iconic in nature....drawing on the most fundamental core symbols and metaphors of the society at large.” A unique attribute of Mississippian mounds is their “deliberate ritual rebuilding through the periodic addition of earth mantles” (Knight 1981:44). Knight interprets these acts of rebuilding as rituals of renewal, in which purification of polluted entities takes place, and balance is restored in the world. Such rituals may take place annually at specific times of the year and may also be practiced as needed. In particular, Knight sees a parallel between prehistoric mound renewal and historic rites of intensification such as the busk or green corn ceremony practiced by the Creeks and other historic southeastern Indians. Mound ceremonialism is thus considered a long-standing tradition in the southeastern United States, one with deep roots in prehistory and indeed, one that is still practiced among Native American groups today, albeit in transformed fashion.

Pauketat and Alt (2003:161) tell us that “*traditions are the media of change*, co-opted and promoted in ways that selectively draw from the past” (emphasis in original). The “change of emphasis within an unbroken ritual tradition” (Knight 1989:280) suggested above for southeastern Indian groups may be an illustration of how this works

in the long term, but we can also see it on the micro-scale, in the mound building practices of Mississippian people.

Pauketat suggests that a change in the “rhythm” of mound construction as evidenced by the relative thickness of various fill episodes or mantle additions “may be of significance for understanding region-wide political-religious changes in the late prehistoric American Bottom.” Early construction stages at the Kunnemann Mound were “small-scale,” suggesting that the act of constructing the mound was more important than its elevation (Pauketat 1993:146). Later, a shift occurs in the size of fill units; individual mound construction stages become significantly larger. Pauketat suggests that “a major structural change of some kind occurred around the late Stirling phases and is reflected in the rhythmic shift in mound construction” (Pauketat 1993:146). He further suggests that the dominant symbolic meaning might have shifted from an early emphasis on mound-top activities such as renewal and purification rituals to a later emphasis on mound height as symbolic of power relations (Pauketat 1993:147).

Interestingly, archaeological evidence indicates that social and political negotiations were ongoing at Parchman, and these negotiations are reflected in and enabled by the mound building practices of the people who lived there. Clark (2000:106) challenges archaeologists to *look* for evidence of individual actions and events in the archaeological record, emphasizing the importance of uncovering “fine-grained chronologies and spatial scales compatible with individual life histories and events.” I contend that further interpretation of detailed stratigraphic information from Parchman will facilitate greater understanding of the processes by which the people who lived there created their own social realities.

Why Ceramics?

While stratigraphy may tell us something about the nature of mound construction events, ceramics recovered from mound contexts may tell us something about the *chronology* of mound construction. Chronological reconstructions in the Yazoo Basin and elsewhere have been based largely on relative frequencies of pottery types present in ceramic assemblages from surface collections. Mound excavations at Parchman allow us to make comparisons among assemblages with known stratigraphic relationships. A primary goal of the ceramic analysis, therefore, is to compare assemblages from early and late mound construction stages in order to broadly assess the amount of time represented by the stratigraphic sequence. Ceramics from Parchman indicate that mound building took place at a rapid pace, a conclusion that is supported by radiocarbon dates.

An additional goal of ceramic analysis is to contribute to our understanding of chronological and spatial relationships among sites on a regional scale. Parchman Place is the type-site for the Parchman phase, as originally defined by Phillips (1970), where the term “phase” refers to “a geographically coherent group of site locations ... occupied simultaneously or nearly so by local units of a specific socio-political group” (Phillips 1970:524). As stated above, archaeological phases in the Yazoo Basin and elsewhere are largely defined on the basis of the similarities among ceramic assemblages recovered from various archaeological sites. Phillips (1970:23) tells us that ceramic “types, varieties, and modes are vehicles for the expression of cultural and historical relationships. The emphasis on their formal attributes is a matter of prior necessity only because we usually have to formulate these units before we know precisely what the cultural and historical relationships are.” In other words, ceramics can be used to

determine time and space relationships among archaeological sites or site components, a necessary first step in reconstructing relationships among prehistoric social groups. In some cases attempts have been made by archaeologists to identify ethnic groups based primarily on ceramic assemblages—Brain's (1988) discussion of the origins of the historic Tunica is a notable example. That said, archaeologists should proceed with caution in attributing ethnicity to prehistoric groups, and I have made no attempt to do so here.

Once we have established adequate spatial and temporal control by defining archaeological phases, it is possible to address a number of questions about social interactions on a regional scale. It is also possible, however, to investigate cultural phenomena on a smaller, intra-site scale. Ceramics recovered from mound excavations at Parchman, for instance, indicate that mound building there happened very quickly—in what we might call an archaeological instant. I will now turn to Phillips's construction of the Parchman phase, as well as attempts by others at refining it.

Based on surface collections from the Parchman, Carson, Salomon, Dundee, and West sites, Phillips describes the Parchman Phase as “ill-defined” and “unusually tentative” (Phillips 1970:938, 940). Unfortunately, and despite considerable effort by subsequent researchers, this situation has been little remedied since the time of Phillips's writing. This no doubt reflects the difficulties of making divisions that are largely based on relative frequencies of pottery types as well as the fact that the northern Yazoo Basin was so intensely occupied during the Late Mississippian period. Despite their shortcomings—and there are many, not least of which is the fact that they have been and continue by some to be used as a proxy for ethnic groups—phase designations are the

basis for our understanding of both spatial and temporal variation in prehistory and we could do little without them. Mainfort (2005:66) cautions against pigeonholing data into existing constructs, however, and urges us to revise existing site groupings as new data become available. There have been a few notable attempts at refining the cultural chronology of the northern Yazoo Basin further.

In addition to the Parchman phase, Brain assigns Parchman Place to an earlier Hushpuckena phase, geographically centered, like the Parchman phase, in present-day Coahoma County. Phillips had previously defined what he called the Hushpuckena-Oliver Phase in the region but apparently did not recognize a component of this phase at the Parchman site. However, the Hushpuckena-Oliver phase was thus (partially) defined by Phillips as follows: “overwhelming predominance of Mississippi Plain over Bell Plain ...; predominance of Barton Incised over Parkin Punctated ...; Old Town Red and painted wares well represented” (Phillips 1970:942). The definition also includes Walls Engraved, Rhodes Incised, and other “southern” types, including Owens Punctated, Leland Incised, Winterville Incised, and Wallace Incised (detailed descriptions of ceramic types can be found in Phillips et al. 1951, Phillips 1970, Williams and Brain 1983, and Brain 1988).

The less well-defined and arguably later Parchman phase shows “approximately even proportions of Mississippi Plain, *var. Neeley’s Ferry* and Bell Plain ... a marked predominance of Barton Incised over Parkin Punctated,” and the consistent presence of Walls Engraved, *var. Hull*. Also present are some southern types, including Owens Punctated and Leland Incised, although Phillips considers the possibility that these latter types are of “doubtful validity” (Phillips 1970:939-940).

Recent chronological revision in the northern Yazoo Basin is largely based on Brain's (1988) reconstruction of late prehistoric-protohistoric Tunica movements. Breaking from Phillips, Brain places the Oliver phase immediately after Parchman in the early historic period (Hushpuckena II and Parchman are considered protohistoric). Brain's phase designations are slightly refined from Phillips's original definitions, most notably by his division of an early and a late Hushpuckena subphase, and the exclusion of Oliver from Phillips's combined Hushpuckena-Oliver phase. Brain dates Hushpuckena I to the 14th century and describes its geographical extent as "almost exactly coterminous with modern Coahoma County and the northern half of Bolivar County (Brain 1988:266). Sites belonging to the subphase are Parchman, Carson, Stokes Bayou, Oliver, Myer, Bush, Merigold, and Powell Bayou. The subphase is again defined on the basis of its ceramic assemblage, which corresponds to what Williams and Brain (1983) term the Yazoo 5 subset of the Yazoo set, where ceramic sets "comprise a plainware and a group of decorated varieties from one or more types" that can be recognized "as having been made by the same people for the same purposes" (Williams and Brain 1983:89). The Yazoo 5 subset is characterized by "coarsely shell-tempered jars on the exterior upper body surface of which are relatively complex incised, and often punctuated, designs (Brain 1988: 392). Components of the Yazoo 5 subset include Owens Punctated (*vars. Menard, Poor Joe, and Widow Creek*) and Winterville Incised (*var. Ranch*) (Williams and Brain 1983:324). Thus by Brain's chronology, Parchman Place was occupied at least as early as the 14th century, as evidenced by a slightly different (and earlier) ceramic assemblage than the one originally described by Phillips.

The next phase during which the Parchman site was occupied, then, is the (late prehistoric?) Parchman phase itself, which was only slightly refined from Phillips by Starr (1984:166) on the basis of Phillips, Ford, and Griffin's original surface collections as well as additional surface collections by the Mississippi Archaeological Survey and by Ian Brown (1977). Starr concludes that the three data sets correspond fairly well and that Phillips's general description holds up with the new information, although some sites (notably in the Coldwater River area) should probably be excluded from the phase. Sherd counts for the assemblage collected at Parchman by the three surveys are reported in Starr (1984).

Brain tells us that by protohistoric times (1541-1673) the Parchman phase had replaced the Hushpuckena phase, occupying roughly the same region, although "the center of gravity shifted somewhat to the north" (Brain 1988:273). Brain has devised a useful series of maps showing the distribution of the Hushpuckena and Parchman phases through time (Figure 6). Note the absence of the Parchman site from the Hushpuckena II subphase as well as the proliferation of sites occupied during the Parchman phase. Brain defines the Parchman phase by the presence of the Yazoo 8 subset, which is characterized by "incisions (and punctations) arranged in simple rectilinear patterns on the exterior rim surface of widely flaring jars or complex bowls" and includes Barton Incised *vars.* *Davion* and *Portland*, Owens Punctated *var.* *Redwood*, and Winterville Incised *var.* *Tunica* (Brain 1988:274,393). Incidentally, Brain considers this ceramic set to mark the origin of the historic Tunica, who moved out of the Upper Sunflower region before the end of the phase (Brain 1988:277). Brain includes some 26 sites as belonging to the Parchman phase, including the Parchman site itself and the nearby Wilsford site, which

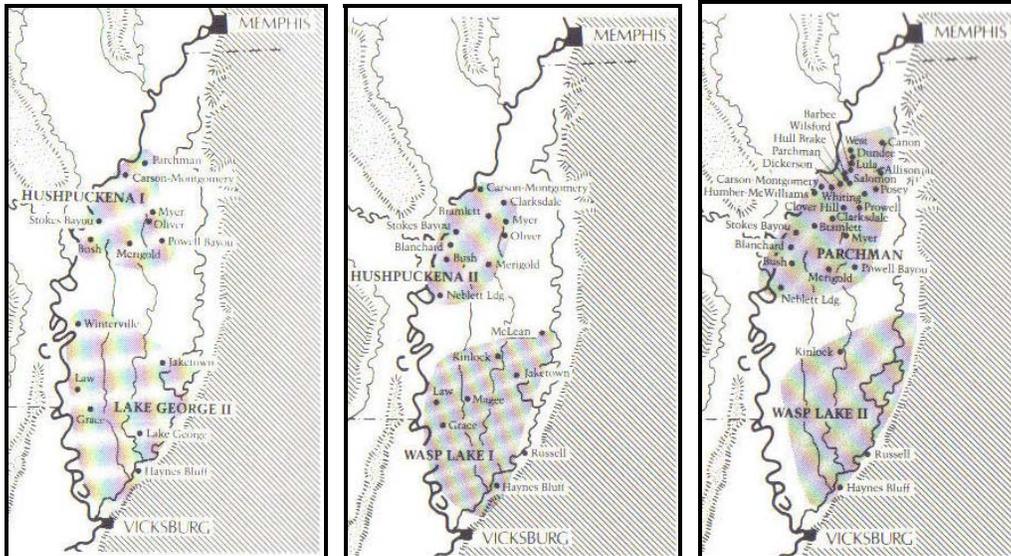


Figure 6. Cultural Phases in the Yazoo Basin according to Brain (1988: Figures 190, 194, 196).

has been investigated by Connaway (1984). It is worth noting the rather wide chronological gap between the Hushpuckena I subphase (14th century) and the Parchman phase (protohistoric) in Brain’s phase reconstruction. I believe most researchers rightly place the Parchman phase in the late prehistoric period, an argument to which we will return (Phillips 1970; Starr 1984; McNutt 1996).

Most recently, Brown (2008) has revisited the Parchman phase designation in our area of interest, noting that in surface collections from the Parchman site, Mississippi Plain ceramics “vastly outnumber” Bell Plain ceramics. This is contrary to Phillips’s assertion that the proportions of the two types are approximately even. This discrepancy is most likely due, however, to the fact that Phillips’s proportions are based on rim counts, while Brown’s and others are based on combined rim and body counts, and also to the tendency of fieldworkers in the early part of the LMS to preferentially collect decorated sherds over plain ones. Brown agrees with Phillips, however, in that Barton Incised ceramics occur in greater frequencies than Parkin Punctated ceramics, and that

Walls Engraved *var. Hull* is a marker for the Parchman phase. Brown does not find evidence of southern types such as Leland Incised that were reported by Phillips et al. (1951) and Phillips (1970). With this definition of the Parchman phase thus in hand, we will now turn to the results of recent mound excavations at Parchman Place, looking in turn at mound stratigraphy, ceramic analysis, and radiocarbon dates.

Mound Stratigraphy at Parchman Place

The primary method I used to reconstruct the stratigraphic sequence of mound building at Parchman was the development of a Harris matrix for the trench deposits (Stevens 2006). Developed in the late 1970s by Edward C. Harris, the Harris matrix is a method designed specifically for archaeological deposits, or stratigraphy that results from the activities of humans, whether those activities are constructive, destructive, or incidental. The method is based on first identifying individual units of stratification, including natural strata, human-made layers, and feature interfaces, and then determining the relationships among them. Each individual stratigraphic unit is numbered and plotted in a simple diagram that, when completed, represents the entire stratigraphic sequence of the site (Brown and Harris 1993:7).

Of particular importance to the Harris matrix is the concept of the interface, which describes both the surfaces of natural and human-made deposits such as structure floors, and also the surfaces of destruction events, such as wall trenches, posts, and pits (Brown and Harris 1993:10). Harris contends that the wealth of stratigraphic information interfaces can provide has largely been overlooked by archaeologists. Indeed, interfaces are more significant than deposits in terms of archaeological questions, as they are the

intended results of human actions. Additionally, interfaces represent the passage of time in a way that deposits do not (Brown and Harris 1993:11). That is, a deposit can be thought of as a single event that took place virtually instantaneously, while an interface, such as the floor of a structure, may have been in use for many years. Finally, Harris argues that treating the deposit as the most important source for temporal information can be problematic because of the nature of residual and infiltrated artifacts and may lead to mistaken chronological assumptions (Harris 1979:93).

This line of reasoning seems particularly valid when considering the nature of the construction of mounds and the structures associated with them. The majority of mound-top structures in the Southeast appear to have been swept clean of artifacts and burned, after which they were capped with borrowed soil, to bury the burned structure, to provide a platform for a later construction, and/or to increase the height of the mound. The soil used to bury structures and to build the mound itself often contains artifacts that have unreliable temporal associations with either the structure or the mound building episode, and therefore, cannot be used to construct a relative chronology. For this reason, it is necessary to develop the stratigraphic sequence without reference to the material remains contained within archaeological deposits. The sequence can then be used as a “testing pattern” against which the results of artifact and other types of analyses can be compared (Harris 1979:92).

The development of the Harris matrix for archaeological deposits in the mound excavation trench at Parchman has resulted in a detailed understanding of the chronological events that took place in this part of the site. I have presented the stratigraphic sequence in considerable detail in a previous work (Stevens 2006) so I will

summarize the sequence here. In brief, nine stages of mound construction were identified, as well as a truncation event that partially destroyed two stages and may have completely destroyed others. Six well-defined structure floors, as well as a seventh probable floor were found in association with mound surfaces. Subsequent to this work, three additional floors were located using down-hole magnetic susceptibility (Lowe and Fogel 2007), but as they remain unexcavated, they will not be discussed here.

The excavation trench itself was 1 m wide and 7 m long, oriented roughly east-west. It was approximately 1.5 m deep on the west end and nearly 3 m deep on the east end (Figure 7). Well over 3 m of mound fill are known to exist beyond the deepest limits of our excavation trench, and the designations first stage, second stage, and so on should be understood to mean only the first stage, second stage, and so on uncovered by our excavations, and not the *actual* first, second, and so forth, stages of mound construction. Additionally, to avoid confusion later, it should be pointed out that stages of mound construction were numbered from bottom to top, or in the order in which they were constructed. Structures and structure floors, on the other hand, were numbered from top to bottom, or in the order in which they were discovered during excavation. In the following section I will attempt to describe mound deposits and interfaces from the bottom up.

Stage 1 of mound construction consists primarily of mound fill, and culminates in the floor of Structure 6 (Figure 8). This floor was fired hard as a result of the structure having been burned prior to abandonment. An unusual feature of the floor is the presence of a low berm on the eastern edge near the single associated wall trench. A series of deposits occurs to the east of this wall trench, which is thought to be related to another



Figure 7. 7x1 m excavation trench.

small mound to the east of the one uncovered by our excavation trench, but further excavation will be required to fully understand what these deposits represent.

The second stage of mound construction begins directly on top of the Structure 6 floor, with a thick layer of daub fall, representing the burning event which destroyed the building. This layer is approximately 50 cm thick at its deepest point, and contains

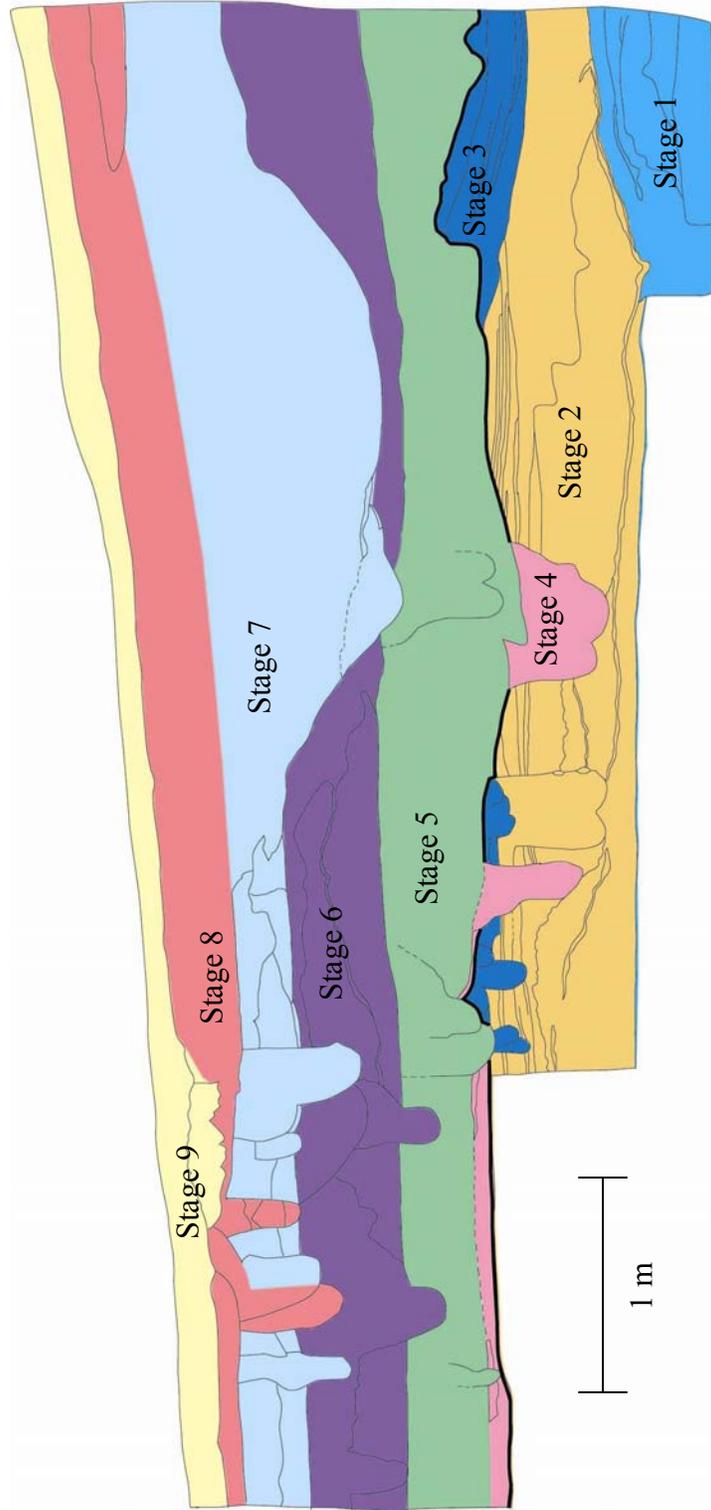


Figure 8. North profile of trench excavation showing stages of mound construction.

within it a layer of fine ash that is thought to be the result of the burning of grass fill within the walls. A sample of burned thatch associated with Structure 6 returned a radiocarbon date of 440 ± 40 B.P. The building remains were covered over with a layer of fill, presumably while the structure was still smoldering, as evidenced by the oxidized nature of the soil in immediate contact with the daub rubble. At this point, a white silty clay, probably kaolin, was used to construct a series of white mantles over the top of the newly purified mound. The closest known source of kaolin is nearly 60 km away, near the present-day city of Batesville, Mississippi (Connaway, personal communication 2004). The distance required to transport the kaolin suggests that there is something significant about its use in the construction of the mound. Like burning and burial, the color white has also been interpreted as symbolic of purification and renewal (Hudson 1976:226), so this is likely a continuation of the same theme represented by the burning and burial of Structure 6. It appears that as each white layer became dingy as a result of mixing with dirt, it was covered over with a new white mantle. At least five white layers, as well as intermediate gray ones, are visible building up to a prepared surface upon which Structure 5 is built. Floor 5 is fired hard and like Structure 6, was burned. However, there is very little daub rubble on top of this floor, indicating that any wall fall might have been removed. Additionally, the floor of Structure 5 is riddled with holes, giving it a “torn up” appearance. Finally, mound fill was deposited directly on top of the Structure 5 floor.

Stage 3 is particularly problematic in terms of interpretation, due to the fact that it was almost entirely destroyed by a truncation event. That is, at some point after the third (and possibly other) phases of construction, someone or some group of people at

Parchman lopped off the top of the mound, leaving very few structural features including a wall trench and three post molds with no visible points of origin. Additionally, to the far east of the profile, on top of the white mound deposits, a series of fill deposits are thought to be associated not only with the small mound that is the main focus of this work, but also with a small mound thought to be located just beyond the eastern limits of our excavation. The fact that these deposits are located at a much higher elevation (as much as 28 cm) than Floor 5 and that they slope up towards the west suggests that the truncation event destroyed a fairly large (although unknown) portion of the mound. It should be understood that Stage 3 may actually represent two or more mound stages. It is also possible that additional stages were entirely removed during the truncation event and no longer exist in the mound stratigraphy.

The truncation itself was the next event that we can detect within the sequence of mound building. As it represents a single destructive event, it is not considered a “stage” of mound construction. The interface of destruction is shown as a thick black line in Figure 8. From east to west, it truncates mound fill belonging to Stage 3, then the series of white layers belonging to Stage 2, destroying all but the eastern mound slopes. Following the profile across to the west, the truncation continues along the white mound, then cuts off the tops of several posts and a wall trench belonging to Stage 3. The truncation continues along the white mound (Stage 2) until it runs into Floor 5 (Stage 2), then bumps along the top of it for the remainder of the excavation trench, tearing it up but not completely destroying it. Mound construction resumes subsequent to this destructive action.

The next stage, Stage 4, is not well represented. In fact, most of the stage is not definable on the north profile wall, which would lead one to doubt its existence. The south profile, however, shows a relatively thin (18 cm at its thickest) deposit of mottled mound fill, which appears to end in a flat, prepared mound surface or interface. Additionally, mound fill and a few very small fragments of a possible floor remain intact in the western portion of both the north and south profile. This floor was not recognized during excavations and does not appear on plan maps. For this reason it was not given a structure number but will henceforth be referred to as the "Missing Floor." It is difficult to say anything conclusive about this construction stage, as evidence for it is sparse and in some cases dubious. Only a few small fragments of a floor remain and there is no structural debris on top of it. It is possible, and maybe even probable, that another truncation event occurred sometime after this stage, but as there is no supporting stratigraphic evidence, this is little more than conjecture.

Stage 5 begins when a thick layer of mound fill was laid down, ranging from approximately 40-60 cm thick, and including two small but distinct deposits as well as a post hole of unknown origins. This layer terminates at a flat platform or mound surface on which Structure 4 was built. This structure floor resembles Floor 6 in that it is fired extremely hard, is entirely intact, and has a small berm on its eastern edge.

Stage 6 commences with the destruction of Structure 4, which results in a layer of burned daub and wall fall deposited directly on the surface of Floor 4. Like the earlier deposit created by the burning of Structure 6, this daub also contains a thin layer of fine ash, this time running along the top of the daub fall. A thick layer of mound fill was then placed over the top of the daub rubble, while the remains of the structure were still hot

enough to cause oxidation and reduction. More mound fill was then added to form a prepared surface for Structure 3. The floor of Structure 3 is much like other floors, and shows evidence of burning although it is not fired quite so hard as Floors 6 and 4. Stage 6 shows indications of actually representing two separate mounds. Two mound surfaces rise to either side of the profile: one to the west, approximately 55 cm above “neutral ground,” or the low spot in between the two. This surface has Structure 3 on its summit. The mound to the east rises approximately 80 cm from the same low spot, although the limits of our excavation trench prevent determining its actual height.

Stage 7 of the sequence begins much like the others, with the burning of Structure 3. A deposit of daub and ash directly on top of Floor 3 represents this event. In addition to deposits of daub on the surface, this event also resulted in the deposition of burned thatch from the structure’s roof, a sample of which returned a radiocarbon date of 390 ± 40 B.P. After the structure burned, borrowed soil was placed over the top of the burned remains, much like before, only this layer shows less evidence of burning than some of the others. This last activity is most apparent on the west mound, where Structure 3 was located. Additional mound fill to the east was also added at this time, although its exact boundaries remain undefined. A deposit of soil mixed with daub located at the eastern edge of the excavation trench indicates that the upper limits of this mound deposit might be just beneath it, however, this is not confirmed. What *is* clear is that there are no longer two distinct mounds at this point. The mound described in this work, as well as the mound to the east (if that is what it is) are now completely subsumed in the side slope of Mound A, which eventually towers over the smaller mound. Finally, a surface was prepared for a new structure, and Structure 2 was built.

There is no daub or wall fall covering Floor 2 so the eighth stage of construction begins with a relatively thin (approximately 6 cm in thickness) layer of soil placed over the top of Structure 2. Structure 1 was built on top of this thin prepared surface. The floor of Structure 1 is not as well fired as most of the other floors, and was extremely difficult to identify during excavation. A burned wooden post associated with the structure returned a radiocarbon date of 430 ± 40 B.P.

Finally, the ninth and final construction phase begins with the burning of Structure 1 and the deposition of its wall fall on the surface of the mound outside the boundary of the house. The remains of Structure 1 were then buried with more soil, although it is difficult to tell exactly how much, as the mound surface has been disturbed by erosion and bioturbation. This concludes the description of events that took place within the limits of the trench exploration at Parchman.

To sum up, nine stages of mound construction were positively identified. All but Stage 3, which was almost entirely destroyed by a truncation event, and Stage 9, which represents the abandonment of the mound, were associated with structures (presumably temples) that were swept clean at the end of their use life, as evidenced by the absence of ceramic and other artifacts in contact with their floor surfaces. The buildings were burned and then buried so quickly that in most cases the soil covering the fired structural remains was also fired to a bright orange color.

Although the repeated sequence of building, using, cleaning, burning, and burying structures seems to indicate that mound construction proceeded in a highly uniform manner, there are a number of features that suggest this is not the case. Mound Stage 2, for instance, culminates in a series of white deposits, indicating that a specially colored

mound surface was maintained for some time before the building of Structure 5. This contrasts with most other mound stages where buildings were not only buried but also replaced very quickly. A second departure from “mound building as usual” regards the truncation event that destroyed a significant portion of the mound—at least one construction stage and possibly more. As the mound was truncated to the level of the white surface and no farther, it is reasonable to surmise that the two circumstances might be related. Finally, the stratigraphic sequence indicates that two small mounds may have existed in the earlier (pre-truncation) stages of mound construction. Indeed, there seems to be a revival or perhaps simply an emphasis on this arrangement as late in the sequence as Mound Stage 6, which exhibits a pronounced valley in between two elevated mound surfaces. Subsequent to this, however, one of two things happens: 1) the westernmost mound is partially subsumed by the easternmost, which becomes what we now refer to as Mound A, or 2) Mound A is conceived of as a different entity entirely, the construction of which incorporates both of the smaller mounds.

These “special features” of mound construction at Parchman can tell us something about the ways the late prehistoric people at Parchman lived and how they practiced mound building. In addition to the ritual significance of burning and burying mound-top structures, I believe the white mound surfaces can be interpreted as ritually significant. I have mentioned previously that the white kaolin used in the construction and/or maintenance of these mound surfaces was transported approximately 60 km from its likely source. This suggests that there was something important and meaningful about the use of this particular sediment. The color white has often been interpreted in terms of purification and renewal, and associated with peace (and the white moiety of peace),

wisdom, breath, sky, and purity, and in some instances is thought to have “magical” properties (Hudson 1976:226; Knight 1986:678; Pursell 2004:147). The use of this color may therefore be seen to represent an extension of the burning/burial phenomenon common at Parchman and other Mississippian sites. If this is the case, it seems that mound building practices were differently focused and had different meanings at this point than at other points in the sequence.

Other explanations may be possible. Pursell (2004) has undertaken a survey of Mississippian platform mounds in the Southeast and has determined that the presence of colored mound surfaces is not an uncommon occurrence. He suggests that “sediments materially bearing color messages inform social understandings,” and further, that these messages, “may have included such concepts as elite status, supernatural/spiritual mediation, clan affiliation or kinship, and the Mississippian cosmology” (Pursell 2004:17). Any one of these explanations may be factored into possible meanings associated with the white mound surface at Parchman. Additionally, considering the importance of “balance” in relation to red-white and other early historic southeastern symbolism, it is possible that the white sediment was used to counteract or “balance” a particularly polluting act or event, perhaps an especially contested succession or some type of economic or political stress.

It also appears significant that the white mound surface was maintained for a period of time *before* a temple (Structure 5) was constructed on its surface. Elsewhere, it is presumed that new structures were built soon after burial of the old structure and construction of a suitable platform. In this case, however, there is evidence for at least five (and probably more) white layers, with intermediate gray layers in between the pure

white ones. As the surface became dirty (polluted?), the area was re-purified, or some other message coded within the white sediment was reinforced. It seems probable that the uniqueness of a white mound surface as well as its continued maintenance corresponds to some particularly trying event for the population (or a subgroup of the population) at Parchman, and that this circumstance was counteracted by a focus on community purification and renewal. The increased periodicity of mound building and its ritual associations at this point in the sequence also seem to indicate periodic communal mound ceremonialism such as that described by Knight (1981). In any case, the white mound mantles represent a dramatic departure from previous mound building practices, which resulted in buildings and associated activity surfaces that were in use for much longer periods of time.

Another apparently significant action within the sequence of events revealed in the excavation trench is the truncation of the mound and destruction of one or more episodes of mound construction. If not entirely unique, this is certainly a rare event. The meaning of this event is difficult to discern. Johnson (2005) has interpreted the event in terms of factional competition for political power at Parchman, suggesting that the small mounds at Parchman were affiliated with particular clans or groups. At some point, one of these factions was able to gain some sort of political advantage over the other (or possibly others), and as a symbol of that new power, lopped off the top of the rival group's mound, then built another, much bigger mound to symbolize their elevated status as well as the subordinate status of other groups. As the first indication of Mound A occurs subsequent to this truncation event, this seems a plausible hypothesis.

This scenario indicates the potential for social elements represented by mounds to be ranked in various ways. Interestingly, construction and use of the smaller mound continued after the initial construction of Mound A in what Johnson has described as “subordinate ritual activity” (Johnson 2003: 5). Subordinate or otherwise, it is likely that mound building and mound-top activity underwent a transformation of meaning during this time period, incorporating the new social relations suggested by the building of Mound A, as well as reactions to it by members of the parties concerned. We do not know what significance was attached to the fact that the small mound was reduced to the level of the white mound and no farther before subsequent large-scale construction began. If the maintenance of a white mound surface can be interpreted as corresponding to a particularly unstable time (for instance, a negotiation for power among groups), then the truncation event can be interpreted as a decisive resolution of this negotiation.

There is further evidence that mound use and/or the meanings attached to mounds may have changed over time, and especially after the truncation event took place. Pauketat (1993) has suggested that a change in the “rhythm” of mound construction as reflected in the relative thickness of mound construction stages may reflect significant socio-political change. At Parchman, such a shift occurs, although it appears to be more gradual than the one described by Pauketat for Cahokia. Specifically, fill episodes related to the mound under discussion tend to be smaller as time goes on, as illustrated in Figure 9. Note that mantle thicknesses for Stage 1 and Stage 3 are unknown due to the limits of our excavation and to the truncation event, while Stage 9 has been excluded as it represents the abandonment of the mound. With the exception of Stage 6 and Stage 4 (which is problematic due to its possible truncation), the sequence follows a

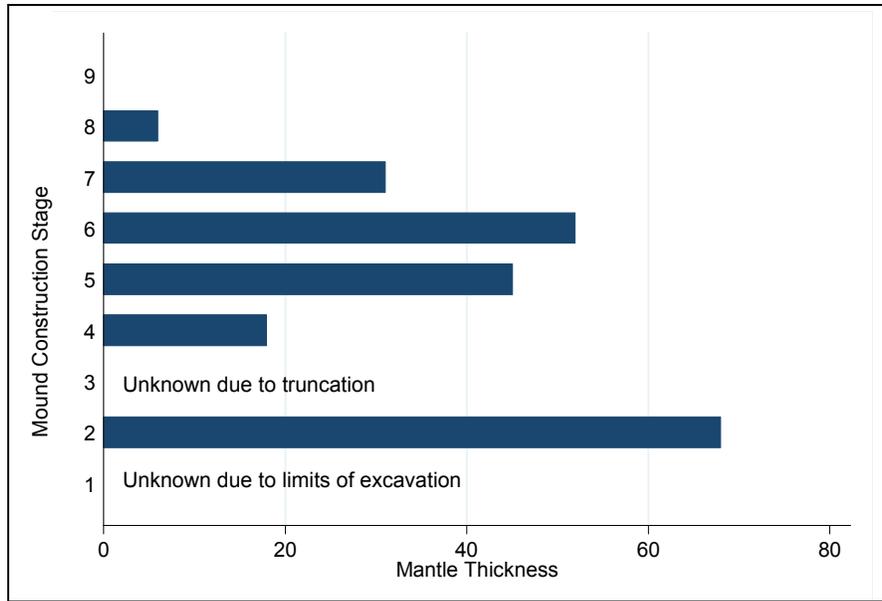


Figure 9. Mantle thickness decreases as mound construction progresses.

general pattern of decreasing mantle size as mound construction progresses. When all known mantle thicknesses are considered, a strong relationship between stage number and mantle thickness can be observed.

The change in the relative thickness of mound construction stages over time indicates that less time and effort was expended on *increasing the height of the mound*. This circumstance could indicate that a change has taken place regarding the way mounds and mound ritual are understood and used. Pauketat (1993: 146) writes that mound construction episodes became larger at Cahokia as power was consolidated in the region. During this transformation, the dominant symbolic meaning associated with mounds shifted from an emphasis on mound top ritual (resulting in small mound construction stages) to an emphasis on the symbolism of the mound itself. If the mound itself is symbolic, then it follows that the larger the mound, the more dominant the symbol.

It seems possible that a similar but opposite transformation may have taken place at Parchman, especially after the truncation of the small mound diminished its importance as a symbol. Mound A subsequently became the dominant symbolic feature of the site. I mean to suggest that as time went on, and Mound A became increasingly larger and more dominant, that the height/size of the smaller mound became less important symbolically than the ritual activity that presumably still took place there. Blitz (1999) has alternatively suggested that dominant groups may have controlled labor (and hence, the height of mounds) to some extent: “Subordinate groups could construct lower, smaller mounds for their own constituency so long as labor was supplied for the symbol of collective unity and leadership, the main mound of the principal chief and superordinate group” (Blitz 1999:586). There is no reason to conclude that one of these explanations of changing mound height precludes the other. In fact, if labor allotted to the construction of subordinate mounds *was* controlled by a dominant group, then it was likely the intention of that group to diminish the symbolic importance of the smaller mound by curtailing its extent.

It also seems possible that the pace of mound construction may have increased as time progressed. Johnson (2005:4) has described the pace of mound building at Parchman as “rapid, almost frantic,” based on the facts that the upper mound slopes show almost no weathering, and the destroyed structures were buried immediately as evidenced by reduced mound fill in direct contact with burned daub deposits. This rapid pace may indicate that the process of mound building was more important than the end product: the mound itself, and further, that mound building at Parchman may have been related to the negotiation and expression of rank among competing lineages or other groups. Similarly,

I have suggested that after the truncation event (perhaps a negotiation and/or expression of rank) occurred, that the mound itself decreased in symbolic significance as evidenced by the decreasing mantle thickness of each new addition. It seems that the late prehistoric people of Parchman were building mounds at a much faster rate than elsewhere in the Mississippian world. This may indicate that relationships among people and groups were negotiable and indeed, actively *negotiated* at this point in time and in this place.

Results of Ceramic Analysis

The recent investigations of Parchman Place, including both mound excavations and surface collections, have resulted in the largest sample of ceramics from the Parchman site to date. I will focus here on the ceramics recovered from mound excavations in 2003 and 2004, which resulted in a sample of 1,445 body and rim sherds, which was analyzed by Matthew Reynolds and me. Sherd counts for mound excavations are shown in Table 1. These counts have been split for the purposes of analysis into 13 analysis units (A-M), one for each of the 9 mound construction stages plus an additional 5 that represent mixed contexts. As a result of its truncation, Mound Stage 3 was barely represented stratigraphically and appears in Table 1 only as part of analysis unit C, which contains material from Mound Stages 2, 3, 4, and 5. As the truncation event happened sometime after the construction of Stage 3 and sometime before the construction of Stage 4, analysis unit C is comprised of material from both pre-and post-truncation mound contexts. Table 2 presents frequencies of decorated types in the overall sample, which may be more meaningful for characterizing the assemblage than plainwares, because of

Table 1. Combined rim and body sherd counts recovered from mound excavations at Parchman Place (22CO511).

Analysis Unit	Mound Construction Stage	Avenue Polychrome var. Avenue	Barton Incised var. Barton	Barton Incised var. Estill	Baytown Plain var. Unspecified	Bell Plain var. Bell	Carson Red on Buff var. Carson	Harrison Bayou var. Harrison Bayou	Hollywood White var. Hollywood	Leland Incised var. Unspecified	Mississippi Plain var. Unspecified	Mulberry Creek Cordmarked var. Unspecified	Nodena Red and White var. Nodena	Old Town Red var. Beaverdam	Owens Punctated var. Unspecified	Parkin Punctated var. Parkin	Plaquemine Brushed var. Grace	Pouncey Ridge Pinched var. Pouncey	Unidentified	Unidentified-Engraved	Unidentified-Incised	Unidentified-Punctated	Walls Engraved var. Hull	Winterville Incised var. Winterville		
M	9	3	1						25				3									2		34		
L	89		2	1	3	4	2		46		1	1							2					62		
K	8	3	6			11	3		143		2	1	6						1			1		177		
J	78		6	1	1	8	1		60		2	1	14			1			3		2	1		101		
I	7	2	5		1	21	6	1	151		5	1	15						2			1		211		
H	67					1			12															13		
G	6					1			3															4		
F	56		4		2	12	1		67			1					1							89		
E	5	2	11	2	1	46	1	1	268	1	1		1	7			2	1						345		
D	4		1			2			23															26		
C	2345	4	12	8	3	30		1	219		2	3	2	1	1	1	1		1	1		1		290		
B	2		1			4			71															76		
A	1	1				2			13														1	17		
			12	51	12	12	142	14	1	2	1	1101	1	13	8	1	47	1	1	5	1	9	1	4	5	1445
			1%	4%	1%	1%	10%	1%	0%	0%	0%	76%	0%	1%	1%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	

Table 2. Percentage of decorated rim and body sherds recovered from mound excavations at Parchman Place (22CO511).

Analysis Unit	Mound Construction Stage	Sherd Totals	Avenue Polychrome var. Avenue	Barton Incised var. Barton	Barton Incised var. Estill	Carson Red on Buff var. Carson	Harrison Bayou var. Harrison Bayou	Hollywood White var. Hollywood	Leland Incised var. Unspecified	Mulberry Creek Cordmarked var. Unspecified	Nodena Red and White var. Nodena	Old Town Red var. Beaverdam	Owens Punctated var. Unspecified	Parkin Punctated var. Parkin	Plaquemine Brushed var. Grace	Pouncey Ridge Pinched var. Pouncey	Walls Engraved var. Hull	Winterville Incised var. Winterville
M	9	8	38%										38%		25%			
L	89	7	29%	14%	29%				14%	14%								
K	8	22	14%	27%	14%				9%	5%			27%					5%
J	78	28		21%	4%	4%			7%	4%			50%		7%			4%
I	7	36	6%	14%		17%	3%		14%	3%			42%					3%
H	67	0																
G	6	0																
F	56	7		57%		14%		14%			14%							
E	5	27	7%	41%	7%	4%	4%	4%	4%		4%	4%	26%					
D	4	1		100%														
C	2345	35	11%	34%	23%		3%		6%	9%		6%	3%	3%				3%
B	2	1		100%														
A	1	2	50%															50%
		174	7%	29%	7%	8%	1%	1%	1%	1%	7%	5%	1%	27%	1%	1%	2%	3%

their more narrow spatial and chronological distributions. Frequencies based on the entire ceramic assemblage, however, can be found in Table 1.

Summarily, Mississippi Plain *var. Neeley's Ferry* makes up 76% of the total sample from trench excavations, with Bell Plain a distant second at 10%, a proportion more in line with Brown's (2008) assessment than with Phillips's (1970). Barton Incised (*vars. Barton and Estill*) makes up 5%, while Parkin Punctated makes up a further 3%. Excluding plainwares, Barton Incised comprises 36% and Parkin Punctated 27% of decorated types. Types present in lower frequencies include Carson Red on Buff (8%), Nodena Red and White (7%), Avenue Polychrome (7%), Old Town Red (5%), Winterville Incised (3%), Walls Engraved (2%), and Hollywood White (1%). One example each of Harrison Bayou, Leland Incised, Mulberry Creek Cordmarked, Owens Punctated, Plaquemine Brushed *var. Grace* (alternatively Grace Brushed), and Pouncey Ridge Pinched were also recovered.

As mentioned above, frequencies of Mississippi Plain and Bell Plain accord well with frequencies reported by Brown (1977; 2008). However, although I encountered high frequencies of Barton Incised (36% of decorated sherds), they are not nearly as high as those reported by Brown (48%). Strangely, there is not a single example of Parkin Punctated in Brown's collection, and only one reported by Starr (1984), who tabulated sherd frequencies based on the surveys of Phillips, Ford, and Griffin (1951), Brown (1977), and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History collections. In contrast to these previously reported collections, Parkin Punctated wares are well-represented in the mound context and make up 27% (n = 47) of decorated sherds in my sample, approaching frequencies of Barton Incised in later mound construction stages. Painted

types, including Carson Red on Buff, Nodena Red and White, Avenue Polychrome, and Old Town Red are well represented, in accordance with previous findings. And in accordance with Phillips (but not Brown) southern types such as Leland Incised, Plaquemine Brushed *var. Grace*, and Winterville Incised, *var. Winterville* are represented in small numbers. Phillips's claim that Walls Engraved *var. Hull* is a marker for the Parchman phase is also supported here, although notably, it is only present in later mound stages.

Description of Ceramic Types Discussed in the Text

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to briefly describe the types and varieties under discussion in terms of their temporal and spatial distributions. Please refer to Figure 10 for examples of ceramic types discussed. Mississippi Plain *var. Neeley's Ferry* has already been discussed as the dominant type in this assemblage. Phillips et al. (1951:105) tell us that this type became increasingly popular throughout the Yazoo region during the Late Baytown period and came to dominate Early Mississippi period assemblages. Phillips (1970:134) emphasizes its distribution in the northern Yazoo Basin and comparable areas west of the Mississippi River, as well as its dominance in the Late Mississippi period. This ceramic type is most often associated with a common vessel form referred to by Phillips et al. (1951) as the "standard Mississippi jar form" (Figure 11). Both Barton Incised (*vars. Barton and Estill*) and Parkin Punctated (*var. Parkin*) are considered to be decorated types closely related to Mississippi Plain *var. Neeley's Ferry*, and seem to have similar distributions as well as



Figure 10. Decorated ceramic types represented in the Parchman assemblage. a-b, Barton Incised var. *Barton*, c. var. *Estill*; d-f, Avenue Polychrome var. *Avenue*; g. Carson Red of Buff var. *Carson*; h-j, o-p, Parkin Punctated var. *Parkin*; k. Pouncey Ridge Pinched var. *Pouncey*; l-n, Nodena Red and White var. *Nodena*; q. Harrison Bayou var. *Harrison Bayou*; r. Owens Punctated var. *Unspecified*; s. Leland Incised var. *Unspecified*; t-u. Winterville Incised var. *Winterville*; v. Bell Plain var. *Bell* (bottle base); w-y. Walls Engraved var. *Hull*.

vessel forms. Both types reached their peak in the Late Mississippi period, with Barton Incised peaking earlier than Parkin Punctated. Phillips (1970: 45) additionally tells us that Barton Incised var. *Barton* is primarily found in the northern Yazoo Basin and tends to grade into var. *Estill* in the southern part of the region. Pouncey Pinched var. *Pouncey* is thought to be related to Parkin Punctated and its distribution is also similar, although it

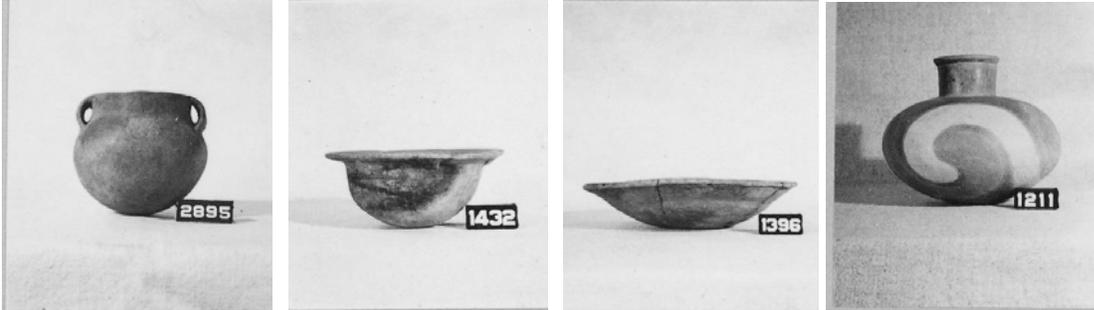


Figure 11. Common Mississippian vessel forms: “standard Mississippi jar form;” bowl; shallow bowl or plate; bottle. From Phillips (1939).

is certainly more rare than Parkin Punctated. Owens Punctated, also fairly rare, seems to be found throughout the region during the Late Mississippi period.

Mississippi Plain and associated wares largely replaced earlier Baytown Plain, which has been dubbed a “super-type” by Phillips (1970:48) because it is “too wide-ranging and long-lasting to be a pottery type.” Nonetheless, Baytown Plain is rare in Mississippian assemblages in the northern Yazoo Basin. Phillips et al. (1951:82) indicate that it was ubiquitous in the region up until the end of the Baytown period. Mulberry Creek Cordmarked has a similar distribution, and these are the only early types represented in our collection.

The third type of plainware identified in the mound deposits is Bell Plain *var. Bell*, which is a finer ware than Mississippi Plain and rather than storage and cooking jars, Bell Plain vessel forms tend toward bowls, plates, and bottles (Fig.11). Phillips et al. (1951:126) tell us that Bell Plain is found in Late Baytown assemblages, but that it becomes a dominant type in the Early Mississippi period, increasing in dominance through the Late Mississippi period.

Painting is a common decorative feature of both Bell Plain and Mississippi Plain ceramics and several painted types are represented in the present sample. Old Town Red

var. Beaverdam has the widest distribution of any of the painted types, found throughout the Early and Late Mississippi periods within the region. Carson Red on Buff, Nodena Red and White, and Hollywood White have their maximum occurrence in the Late Mississippi period, while Avenue Polychrome is even later, considered by Phillips to represent the Terminal Mississippi Period (Phillips 1970:41). All but Old Town Red are considered to have a northern distribution.

In addition to the above ceramic types that seem to be indigenous to the northern Yazoo Basin, several types occur in our assemblage that may be considered to have their origins in the southern part of the basin. These types are Harrison Bayou *var. Harrison Bayou*, Leland Incised, Plaquemine Brushed *var. Grace*, Walls Engraved *var. Hull*, and Winterville Incised *var. Winterville*. With the exception of Harrison Bayou, which primarily occurs in the Early Mississippi period, these types all have maximum occurrence in the Late Mississippi period.

Overall, the ceramic assemblage recovered from mound excavations at Parchman Place accords well with both Phillips's and Brown's descriptions of Parchman Phase ceramics. It accords less well, however, with Brain's Yazoo 8 subset, which should include Barton Incised *vars. Davion* and *Portland*, Owens Punctated *var. Redwood*, and Winterville Incised *var. Tunica*. Barton Incised *var. Davion*, as I understand, is simply an alternative name for Barton Incised *var. Barton*, which I have found to be the most common of decorated types in the mound assemblage. Excepting this, however, the other varieties listed by Brain as present in Parchman Phase assemblages are all conspicuously absent from this collection. Brain's Yazoo 8 subset, however, is defined on the basis of collections from Carson, Stokes Bayou, and Myer, all "Parchman phase" sites close to

Parchman itself. The discrepancies between assemblages, therefore, might be due to cultural or possibly chronological differences among the sites. Incidentally, Brown (2008:382) has also found that “the markers that Brain put forth really do not seem to be very common in the region.”

Culture-historical phase revisions must, of course, be accomplished on the basis of adequate collections from multiple sites, and this must be a focus of future work in the Yazoo Basin if we are to say much about the social and political lives of the people who lived in the region. The most I can offer to this end is the suggestion that the definition of the Parchman phase be expanded to include assemblages with high frequencies of Mississippi Plain compared to Bell Plain and with approximately equal frequencies of Parkin Punctated and Barton Incised. However, because my collections come from a stratified context rather than surface collections, I may be able to offer a site-specific chronological view of ceramic assemblages, albeit with less fine-grained precision than I have heretofore discussed mound stratigraphy itself.

Before continuing further, a few caveats are in order. First and most obvious: care should be taken when discussing chronology with reference to redeposited archaeological material, such as that comprising mound fill. I have chosen to present the results of this analysis as if they are chronologically meaningful, although, of course, it is difficult to fully assess the extent to which they are. All that can be said with any confidence is that ceramic types discovered in various mound fill episodes must have been in use at the Parchman site prior to or contemporary with the construction of that particular mound stage. Second, splitting the ceramic assemblage into various units (in this case 13) has a significant affect on sample size, which reduces the representation of

rare types, even if they *were* present at any given time. Third, as the initial mound excavations were “exploratory,” not all excavation units were screened, particularly in cases where the mound fill appeared to be “clean.” In light of the above-mentioned issues regarding redeposited fill and sample size I decided to group decorated sherds into a pre-truncation class and a post-truncation class in order to assess changes in ceramic assemblages that might coincide with this undoubtedly significant event. While this grouping means that the analysis is less fine-grained than our stratigraphic knowledge, it is an improvement on analyses performed using surface collections, and may shed some light on the question of phase affiliations at Parchman. It should be noted that one mixed-context analysis unit spans the truncation event and therefore, should be viewed with caution.

Splitting the entire ceramic assemblage from mound excavations into a pre-truncation and a post-truncation assemblage may allow chronological differences between them to become apparent. Undoubtedly, sample size affects the results when the data are split in this way, as the pre-truncation sample is much smaller ($n = 93$) than the post-truncation sample ($n = 1,062$). However, 93 is not a negligible sample and we can therefore say *something* about it. There are five ceramic types represented by the pre-truncation sample. Mississippi Plain sherds make up the overwhelming majority of the pre-truncation assemblage at 90%. Bell Plain makes a distant second at 6%, while Avenue Polychrome, Barton Incised, and Winterville Incised comprise 1% each of the total. While circumstances prevent me from saying much about the significance of these proportions, it *is* significant that both Avenue Polychrome and Winterville Incised appear in the sample. It is notable that Avenue Polychrome shows up in a relatively small

sample early on in the mound construction sequence as it is thought to be a type that occurs very late in the region. Phillips places it in the Terminal Mississippi period, while Brain considers it to be protohistoric. This occurrence would seem to indicate then, that the entire sequence of mound construction investigated here occurred very late in prehistory at the earliest. Phillips's and others observations that southern types are also present in both the Hushpuckena and Parchman phases is also corroborated here by the presence of Winterville Incised in an early stage of mound construction and suggests trade or some other form of contact with groups to the south.

The post-truncation ceramic assemblage shows much more diversity in decorated wares than the pre-truncation assemblage, but again, some of this apparent trend can be attributed to the much larger size of the sample from post-truncation contexts.

Proportions of Mississippi Plain and Bell Plain are slightly changed, with Mississippi Plain making up 75% of the sample and Bell making up 7%. Decorated wares that are well-represented in the sample include Parkin Punctated (4%), Barton Incised (4%), Carson Red on Buff (1%), Nodena Red and White (1%), and Avenue Polychrome (1%). Other types present but making up less than one 1% of the total include Walls Engraved *var. Hull*, Winterville Incised, Harrison Bayou, Hollywood White, Leland Incised, Mulberry Creek Cordmarked, and Owens Punctated. Perhaps the most notable observation regarding this assemblage is that Parkin Punctated (n = 45) outnumbered Barton Incised (n = 42) in post-truncation deposits. I do not believe that this fairly even ratio of Barton to Parkin has been observed previously in Parchman phase sites, but further comparisons with assemblages from other sites will be needed to say anything definitive about what this may mean. Regardless, the remaining post-truncation

assemblage exhibits some characteristics that are no doubt beginning to sound familiar: high ratio of Mississippi Plain to Bell Plain, good representation of painted types (in this case Carson Red on Buff and Nodena Red and White outnumber Avenue Polychrome), conspicuous presence of southern types such as Leland Incised, Owens Punctated, and Winterville Incised, as well as presence of that so-called “marker” of the Parchman phase, Walls Engraved *var. Hull*. Despite the aforementioned problem of sample size, and excepting the unexpected ratio of Barton Incised to Parkin Punctated, I see very little reason to assume that the pre- and post-truncation assemblages are significantly different from one another, or that they represent passages of time that are inconsistent with interpretations based on radiocarbon dates, discussed below.

Radiocarbon Dates from Parchman

Although the Harris matrix method of diagramming archaeological stratigraphy places emphasis on the time component, it can do little more than suggest a relative chronology while acknowledging that significant periods of time may have elapsed where interfaces or living surfaces are present. Additionally, ceramic assemblages are even less precise regarding the passage of time, particularly in cases such as this one, where regional phase designations have not yet been worked out with any degree of confidence. Absolute dates are needed to say anything more definitive.

Three samples from mound contexts were submitted for absolute dating. Calibrated radiocarbon dates are reported in Table 3. The first sample is burned thatch associated with the destruction of Structure 6 (Mound Stage 1). The measured radiocarbon age reported is 440 ± 40 B.P., with a calibrated date of cal A.D. 1430. One

Table 3. Results of Radiocarbon analysis.

Sample	Stage	Intercept (Calibrated)	1 Standard Deviation	2 Standard Deviations
Floor 1	8	AD 1450	AD 1430-1470	AD 1420-1510 AD 1600-1620
Floor 3	6	AD 1470	AD 1450-1510 AD 1500-1620	AD 1430-1530 AD 1550-1630
Floor 6	1	AD 1430	AD 1420-1450	AD 1410-1470

standard deviation from the mean gives a range of cal A.D. 1420-1450, and two standard deviations gives a range of cal A.D. 1410-1470. The second sample is also burned thatch, this time associated with the destruction of Structure 3 (Mound Stage 6). The conventional radiocarbon age is 390 ± 40 B.P., and the calibrated date is cal A.D. 1470. Two date ranges fall within one standard deviation of the mean: cal A.D. 1450-1510 and cal A.D. 1500-1620. Two standard deviations yield date ranges of cal A.D. 1430-1530 and cal A.D. 1550-1630. The third and final sample is a charred wooden post associated with Structure 1 (Mound Stage 8). The conventional radiocarbon age reported for this sample is 430 ± 40 B.P., with a calibrated date of cal A.D. 1450. One standard deviation gives a range of cal A.D. 1430-1470, and two standard deviations gives a range of cal A.D. 1420-1510. A second set of intercepts within two standard deviations gives a date range of cal A.D. 1600-1620. For the purpose of simplification, calibrated dates (i.e. reported intercepts between the average radiocarbon age and the calibration curve) will be used in the following discussion.

As Structure 6 is the earliest structure in the sequence, and Structure 1 is the latest, I hoped that radiocarbon dates could be used to determine the duration of mound building activity within the excavation trench, as well as the average duration of use per

phase of mound construction. I also hoped that the dates of structures 1 and 3 could be averaged and compared to the overall average to determine whether mound building actually sped up over time. Unfortunately, the calibrated dates revealed by radiocarbon dating are not sequential. However, statistical error of this kind is not uncommon when dealing with radiocarbon dates, and overall the dates accord very well with one another, suggesting that mound construction activity took place in this part of the site during the middle part of the 15th century.

Calibrated dates for Structures 6 (cal A.D. 1430) and 3 (cal A.D. 1470) indicate that the construction of at least five structures (Structures 6, 5, 4, 3, and the Missing Structure), corresponding to at least six phases of mound construction, happened in as little as 40 years. This averages out to less than seven years (6.67) per mound construction episode, and if the truncation event destroyed more than one stage, the average would, of course, be less. Projecting this average to the rest of the mound indicates that the entire sequence may have happened in little more than half a century (Stage 9 was not included in this estimate as it presumably represents the abandonment of the mound). These estimates for Parchman are significantly shorter than estimates for the duration of use of individual mound stages provided by other researchers: 15-25 years (Hally 1996), 21-24 years (Schnell et al. 1981), 25-50 years (Blitz and Livingood 2004). In fact, even if we consider the earliest and latest reasonable intercepts within two standard deviations of the mean (cal A.D. 1410 for Floor 6 and cal A.D. 1530 for Floor 3), the average duration of use for individual mound stages uncovered by our excavations is still only 15 years, on the low end of other estimates. The very latest date ranges falling within two standard deviations of the mean (cal A.D. 1500-1620 and cal A.D.

1550-1630 for structure 3) are thought to be unreasonably late, but we would do well to remember Brain's (1988) placement of the Parchman phase in the protohistoric rather than prehistoric era, despite the lack of evidence of protohistoric artifacts (but see Brown 2008). Regardless, evidence based on mean calibrated dates lends support to the theory that mound building at Parchman took place at an almost "frantic" pace (Johnson 2005).

Multiple lines of evidence thus point to the conclusion that the people living at Parchman Place in the middle part of the 15th century were building mounds at a rapid pace. The presence of Avenue Polychrome (a very late ceramic type) in the earliest stages of mound construction indicates that the entire sequence occurred late in prehistory; radiocarbon dates from both pre- and post-truncation contexts corroborate ceramic evidence. The stratigraphic sequence also points to rapid mound building as indicated by quick burial of burned buildings and the virtual absence of weathering on upper mound slopes. Interestingly, however, mound stratigraphy indicates that the rhythm and pace of mound construction, though relatively fast, was inconstant. The most dramatic evidence of this is the maintenance of a white mound surface. Prior to this phenomenon, mound construction stages were relatively thick, and served as platforms for large ceremonial structures that were likely used for an extended period of time before they were destroyed, buried, and replaced. At some point within this short sequence, however, a radical shift in mound building occurs—multiple mound stages accumulate rapidly in the form of thin layers of white kaolin one on top of another. The periodicity of mound building represented by this sequence may not be precisely known, but it is certain that no great time depth is represented by these deposits. Following this episode of rapid ritual building, mound construction was disrupted by a truncation event. This

destructive event reduced the height of the mound to the level of the white mound surface, after which mound building apparently proceeded much as it had in the earliest mound stages, with two exceptions. After the truncation, the mound itself was incorporated into a much larger mound (Mound A). Additionally, earthen mantles became less substantial as time went on, indicating another shift in how mound building was understood and practiced.

Conclusions

If the De Soto chroniclers offer us a snapshot of what life was like for the native peoples of the northern Yazoo Basin in the mid-16th century, archaeological investigations at Parchman Place can shed some light on the lives of people living a century or so earlier. Archaeology, however, has the potential to offer more than just a snapshot in time—in effect, we can see the material manifestations of cultural processes and group relations. We can observe how “traditions” such as mound building are transformed in the short and long term by the practices of individuals and sodalities. Evidence of mound building at Parchman has given us a tantalizing glimpse of some of these processes and transformations of meaning. The maintenance of a white mound surface, for instance, is suggestive of community-based renewal ceremonies, both in its use of a specially-colored sediment and in its periodicity. The subsequent truncation and incorporation of a small mound into a much larger one is indicative of the ongoing negotiations of groups for political power in the northern Yazoo Basin in the mid-15th century, and a marked change in the rhythm and pace of mound construction may

indicate a change in the way mound building and mound top ritual were employed by the people of Parchman to suit their needs.

These observations may be illuminating, but if archaeologists are to reconstruct more than just a glimpse of the past and those who populated it we have some additional work to do. The number and density of Parchman phase sites in the immediate region suggest an archaeological richness that promises to reward future efforts. Additional work with ceramics obtained from controlled stratigraphic contexts will aid us in constructing fine-grained chronologies, allowing us to work out temporal relationships among sites and cultural relationships among people in the region and farther afield. Mound excavations at nearby sites such as Carson, Salomon, and Wilsford may tell us if the social and political processes reflected in and enabled by mound building practices are unique to Parchman or mirror similar negotiations in other places. Finally, excavations of non-mound contexts such as houses and associated middens may help us construct a more nuanced picture of the way people lived in the past.

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