

### 3

## The Late Prehistory of the Ohio-Mississippi Rivers Confluence Region, Kentucky and Missouri

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The Ohio-Mississippi rivers confluence region (Figure 3-1) stretches from the city of Cairo, Illinois, down the Mississippi River to the Kentucky-Tennessee state line. It takes in the Cane Hills and Big Bottoms (Davis 1923) on the Kentucky side of the river and the Cairo Lowland in Missouri. The Kentucky portion is predominately upland, and the floodplain is narrow except at its northern and southern ends where river bends create its maximum width. The steep valley bluffs average about 50 m high, and gently rolling uplands stretch to the east from the bluff crests. The native cover was hardwood forest with dense stands of cane as the major undergrowth along the bluffs and the most well-drained parts of the floodplain. Today, most of the uplands are in pasture or woodlots, and the bottoms are cultivated. Across the river in Missouri, the Cairo Lowland presents a stark geographical contrast. It is a flat floodplain that lies mostly within the present meander belt of the river. It was once covered by a mixture of hardwood forest, cypress swamps, and lakes, but it is now almost entirely in row crop cultivation (Lewis 1974).

This chapter summarizes current understanding of Mississippi period archaeology in the study region with particular emphasis on recent research results of the University of Illinois's "Western Kentucky Research Project" (UIUC-WKY), which began there in 1982. My focus is specifically on the last half of the period, A.D. 1300-1700, referred to here simply for descriptive ease as the "late" Mississippi period. I also treat the Mississippi period strictly as a unit of archaeological time and keep it separate from the concept of a Mississippian Cultural Tradition. The latter is a unit of cultural similarity and is more than simply a synonym for the period of similar name. This distinction is necessary to avoid several problems, foremost among them being

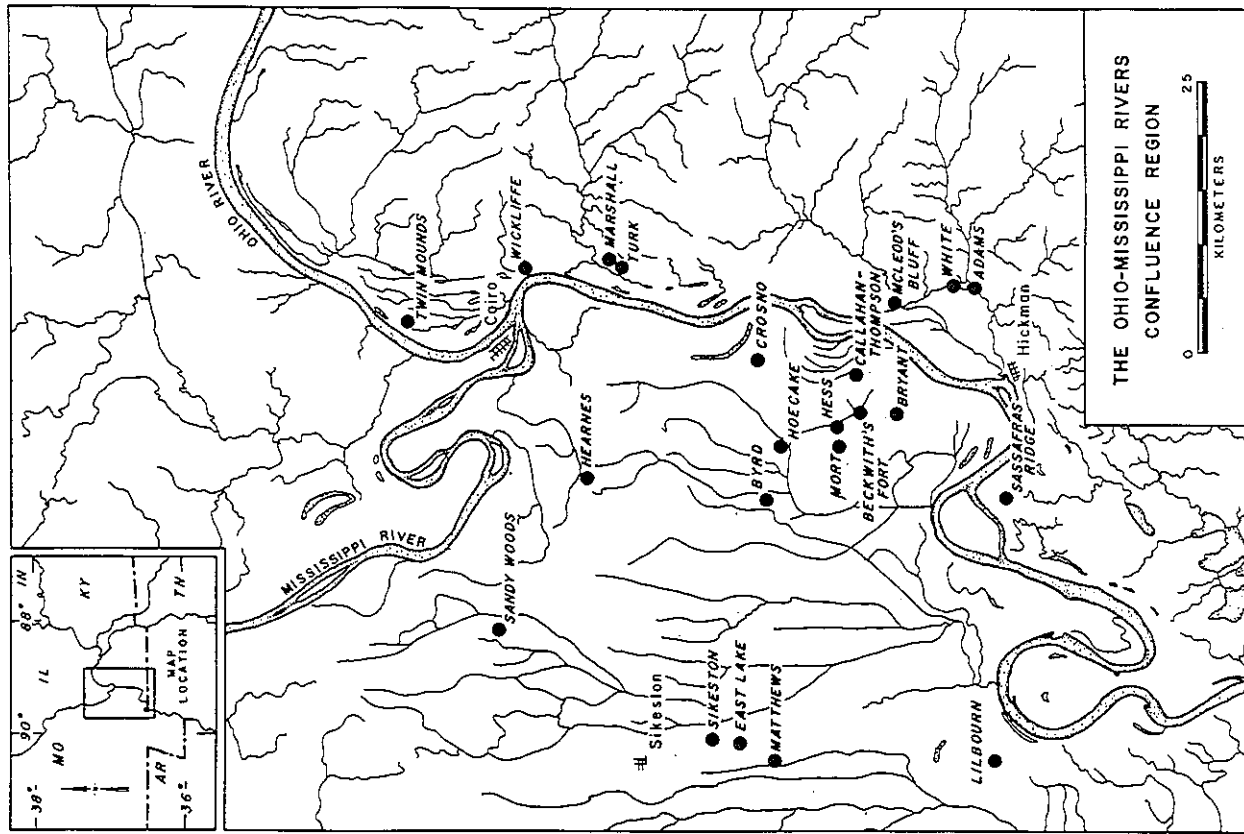


Figure 3-1. Mississippi Period Sites in the Ohio-Mississippi Rivers Confluence Region

the implication that the temporal cutpoints for the Mississippi period are somehow discoverable with great precision rather than being essentially arbitrary.

#### Late Mississippi Period Research

The history of archaeological research in the Ohio-Mississippi rivers confluence region, as well as the folklore of local relic hunters, is dominated by an interest in Mississippi period research problems, sites, and artifacts. This focus on Mississippi period research is not surprising, because many investigators have favorably compared this archaeological manifestation of the Mississippi period with that of the American Bottom in Illinois (e.g., Morse 1977; Phillips 1970:926). In spite of its apparent archaeological richness, the scientific understanding of the late prehistory of this region has developed rather slowly. Although ostensibly part of the vast study area that Phillips et al. (1951) carved out for themselves in the 1940s, the Ohio-Mississippi rivers confluence region was not actually investigated by that project. Their site survey coverage ended at about the latitude of Osceola, Arkansas. The first regional sequence for southeastern Missouri did not emerge until Williams's (1954) important doctoral dissertation filled in the gap left by the Phillips, Ford, and Griffin (1951) survey report. Williams laid out the basic dimensions of one Mississippi period phase, called the Cairo Lowland phase, that would be the basic temporal unit for Mississippi period archaeological research in this region for the following 30 years.

The present sequence (Lewis 1983, 1987), a portion of which is described below, was developed to replace the Cairo Lowland phase, which had become a regional synonym for the Mississippi period. It also supersedes Phillips's (1970:912-13, 925-26) Beckwith and Cairo Lowland phases, which were proposed to make local Mississippi period ceramic assemblages fit notions that still prevailed in the early 1970s concerning the temporal priority of "clay" over "shell" tempering.

The sequence divides the Mississippi period into four phases (Figure 3-2). Each phase spans 200 years, and the temporal cutpoints are drawn at the beginning of every other century encompassed by the period. This treatment of the temporal dimension of phases differs enough from current practice in the Lower Mississippi Valley to warrant explanation.

At the risk of oversimplifying something that is actually a very complex process, phase definition in the Lower Mississippi Valley tends to be based on the delineation of a bundle of material culture attributes that co-occur within the archaeological record of a region. Some subsets of those attri-

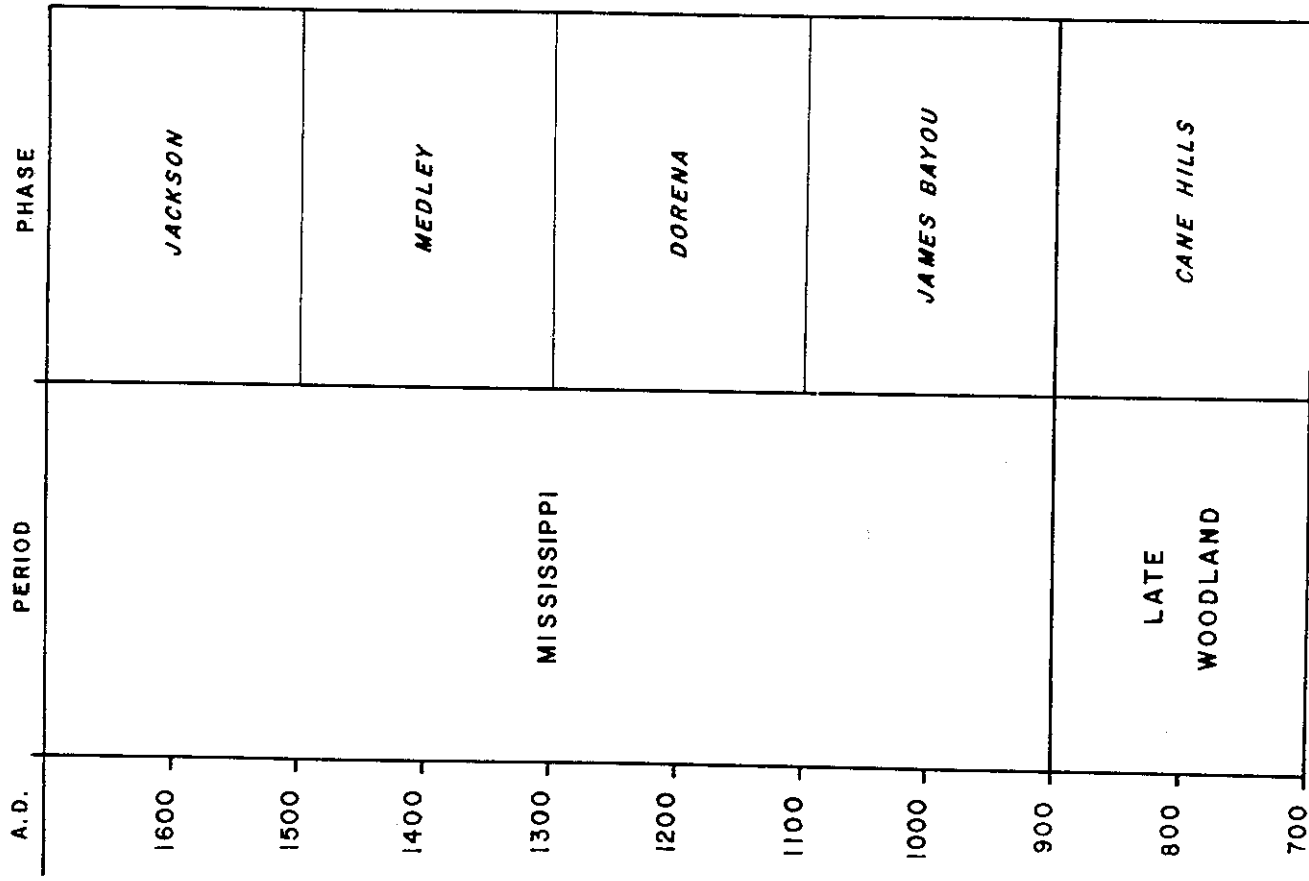


Figure 3-2. The Late Prehistoric Chronological Sequence in the Ohio-Mississippi Rivers Confluence Region

buties are taken to be diagnostic criteria for the identification of new components. The temporal dimensions of a phase, so defined, are continually reassessed through cross dating the diagnostic criteria, interpreting the absolute dating of contexts within which those criteria occur, and the analysis of stratigraphy. The approach followed here differs in that the temporal dimension of a phase is arbitrarily set. Its cultural content is then continually reassessed by cross-dating the material culture attributes that appear to be useful diagnostic features of that phase, interpreting the absolute dating of contexts within which those diagnostic features occur, and analyzing stratigraphy.

I adopted this approach for the following reasons: first, I believe that it is useful analytically to emphasize the temporal nature of units that are defined at the end of the prehistoric portion of the archaeological record in order to facilitate linking to the historical record. For example, the "Vacant Quarter Hypothesis" (Williams 1980, 1985), an argument that a large portion of the Mid-continent was essentially abandoned by aboriginal populations during late prehistory, is primarily a chronological problem. No one disputes the fact that eighteenth-century historical data show a much smaller population in this large region than one would expect from the late prehistory. The quibble, if one can call it that, is when did the population density become smaller? The correct answer has fundamental implications for the interpretation of late prehistory across portions of several states.

Second, my decision to emphasize time over traits (but not to exclude either from consideration) also reflects my concern that the invaluable data offered by radiocarbon and other inexpensive forms of absolute dating in the Lower Mississippi Valley are often poorly integrated into cultural chronologies. A full discussion of this concern is too long to introduce here and must be treated separately. The approach that I have taken in the study region forces the archaeologist to integrate absolute dating into the contextual interpretation of a component much more than would otherwise be necessary, and it removes the possibility that those data are dismissed without investigation when they conflict with the chronological expectations generated from the analysis of other data (for example, cross-dated artifacts, seriations).

The temporal approach to phase construction simply requires one to adopt a more explicit perspective on the problems of component dating and the measurement of cultural changes over time. It is not asserted, as one reviewer mistakenly inferred, that archaeologists who define phases principally on the basis of diagnostic material culture do not continue to revise their understanding of the content of those phases on the basis of new data. The two approaches differ primarily in the relative classificatory weight that

is assigned to the major categories of archaeological data. The temporal approach is compatible in principle with Willey and Phillips's (1958:21) definition of the phase concept and with the operational definition of phase as it has traditionally been applied in the Southwest (Olson 1962). Operationally, the approach does not inhibit or constrain interregional comparisons with phases based primarily on diagnostic material culture attributes. Qualitative differences between phase types are also insignificant at the level of interassemblage comparisons.

Third, a fixed phase interval of 200 years was chosen because it is the minimum unit of prehistoric time that can currently be examined with reasonable chronometric accuracy in this region (that is, it is roughly the resolution limit of available absolute dating techniques). No assumptions about the rate or uniformity of cultural change are implied by the choice of a fixed interval.

Fourth, the phase cutpoints are anchored at the beginning of every other century in the Gregorian calendar for the sake of convenience and to serve as a reminder that the sequence depends fundamentally on the accurate measurement of the age of interpretable archaeological contexts.

Certain aspects of the temporal approach could be described as yielding subperiods rather than phases. For example, one can create phases that are multiethnic. A given phase might subsume under one phase name the contemporaneous archaeological remains of European colonists and Native Americans in a region. This approach also readily permits the construction (but, of course, not the full definition) of phases for which few archaeological data are available from a region. The Jackson phase, as described below, exemplifies aspects of both points.

### The Late Phases

By A.D. 900, the major elements of a settlement hierarchy had emerged in the study region, and, by implication, many of the cultural changes that are widely characterized as "Mississippian" (Griffin 1985a) were already present. Nevertheless, as B. Smith (1984) has pointed out, the region was not a "heartland" for Mississippian cultural developments any more than other parts of the East. It also does not appear to have been the source for, nor the recipient of, waves of migrants to or from other regions at that time. In James Bayou (A.D. 900-1100), the oldest Mississippi period phase, large villages such as the Marshall site in Carlisle County, Kentucky (Sussenbach and Lewis 1987), were thriving communities built on an economic base of maize horticulture, hunting, and gathering. Site surveys have revealed few such vil-

Wickliffe (Lewis 1986; Westler 1985), Turk (Edging 1985), McClod's Bluff (Webb and Funkhouser 1933), Sassafras Ridge (Lewis 1986), and possibly the Beckwith's Fort (Southard and Cottier 1973) towns, and the White (Sussexbach and Lewis 1987) and Bryant (J. Williams 1967) second-order habitation sites. Calibrated radiocarbon dates for these locations are listed in Table 3-1.

Sample No.	Context	Dated Material	DCA	ADC	Laboratory Estimate	Corrected Date or Date Range*	Reference
<b>KENTUCKY</b>							
UUK-156a(1)	Midden	CW	C	C	710±90	1280±90	Edging 1985:15
ISGS-1288	Midden	CW	C	C	700±70	1280±70	Edging 1985:15
ISGS-1289	Midden	CW	C	C	910±70	1040±72 to 1160±72	Edging 1985:15
ISGS-1323	Midden	CW	C	C	710±70	1280±70	Edging 1985:18
ISGS-1324	Midden	CW	C	C	710±70	1280±70	Edging 1985:18
<b>White (ISGS24)</b>							
ISGS-1543	Structure	CW	C	C	640±70	1300±70 or 1390±70	Sussexbach 1987
ISGS-1544	Structure	CW	A	C	560±70	1330±70 or 1400±70	Sussexbach 1987
<b>Adams (ISGS4)</b>							
ISGS-1141	Midden	CW	C	C	700±70	1320±70 or 1390±70	Lewis 1986a:156
ISGS-1149	Midden	CW	C	C	820±70	1290±70	Lewis 1986a:156
ISGS-1150	Structure	CW	B	C	820±70	1220±73	Lewis 1986a:156
ISGS-1151	Structure	CW	C	C	610±70	1320±70 to 1390±70	Lewis 1986a:156
ISGS-1161	Structure	CW	C	C	900±70	1030±70 to 1160±70	Lewis 1986a:156
ISGS-1172	Refuse pit	CW	C	C	810±80	1220±81 to 1260±81	Lewis 1986a:156
<b>Sassafras Ridge (ISGS100)</b>							
ISGS-1142	Structure	CW	B	C	650±80	1250±80 or 1380±80	Lewis 1986a:156
<b>Wickliffe (ISGS4)</b>							
ISGS-1143	Md. A Structure	CW	B	C	830±70	1210±70	Lewis 1986a:156
ISGS-1152	Md. A Structure	CW	B	C	740±70	1240±71	Lewis 1986a:156
ISGS-1171	Midden	CW	C	C	720±70	1260±70	Lewis 1986a:156
ISGS-12529	Md. A, ref. pit	CW	C	C	520±70	1420±71	Lewis 1985:12
<b>MISSOURI</b>							
<b>USS-1201551</b>							
UGA-147	Refuse pit Structure	CW	C	C	355±75	1500-1520±76 or 1610±76	Lewis 1982:152
GAK-1309	Structure	CW	A	C	350±90	1500-1520±91 or 1610±91	Williams 1968:167
<b>Callahan-Township (ISGS11)</b>							
UGA-147	Structure	CW	A	C	480±65	1420±65	Lewis 1982:10
UGA-148	Structure	CW	A	C	570±90	1350±91 to 1390±91	Lewis 1982:10
<b>Bryan (ISGS58)</b>							
GAK-1310	Mound fill	CW	C	C	610±80	1320±81 to 1390±81	Williams 1968:189
<b>Beckwith's Fort (ISGS2)</b>							
UGA-244	Stockade A	CW	A	C	675±70	1290±71	Southard & Cottier 1973:11
N-1250	Stockade A	CW	A	C	835±85	1210±86	Southard & Cottier 1973:11
N-1251	Stockade A	CW	A	C	1090±85	900±86 to 980±86	Southard & Cottier 1973:11
N-1253	Stockade A	CW	A	C	1240±145	720±45 to 780±145	Southard & Cottier 1973:11
N-1252	Stockade B	CW	A	C	995±100	1000±101	Southard & Cottier 1973:11

Context:  
 CW - Carbonized Wood  
 CH - Carbonized Wood & Nutshell  
 MC - Maize, oats, & Grain  
 B - Bone

DCA (Degree of Certainty of Association)  
 A - Full Certainty  
 B - High Probability  
 C - Probable  
 D - Reasonable Possibility  
 E - Unknown, Not Reported

ADC (Possible Age Differential Class)  
 a - Less than 20 years  
 b - About 20 years to 100 years  
 c - More than 100 years  
 d - Unknown, Not Reported

\*Based on Stuiver 1982; Calibrated range given for those samples with radiocarbon contents that have multiple decay-year calibrations.

Table 3-1. Ohio-Mississippi Rivers Confluence Region Late Mississippian Period Radiocarbon Dates

ages, but their scarcity is more apparent than real inasmuch as most of them appear to have been continuously occupied throughout the period. Their presence is therefore usually masked by more recent archaeological deposits.

Cultural developments over the next 800 years continued the developmental trends that had been set in motion during the Late Woodland period. The economic base of the regional cultural adaptation also appears to have remained relatively stable during those centuries. Carbonized maize (*Zea mays*) grains, kernels, and cupules tend to be ubiquitous in Mississippian period middens, and this crop was clearly of great economic importance. Beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), squash (*Cucurbita* sp.), and gourds (*Lagenaria siceraria*) were also cultivated. Important gathered plant foods included hickory (*Carya* sp.) nuts, persimmons (*Diospyros virginiana*), and the seeds of goosefoot (*Chenopodium* sp.) and erect knotweed (*Polygonum erectum*). Staple animal food species were the white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), turtles, and fish.

The top of the settlement hierarchy was dominated by large villages and towns, which were designed around the mound-and-plaza arrangement of public space that is so fundamentally a part of the Mississippian concept. At the bottom of the hierarchy, small hamlets and isolated households occur throughout the region but were most common along the old natural levees or "cane ridges" of the floodplain. Intermediate settlement hierarchy levels appear to have existed, but little is known about them. A recently initiated doctoral dissertation research project by Paul Kreisa, a University of Illinois graduate student, focuses specifically on improving our understanding of those "second order" settlement levels in this region.

Medley Phase (A.D. 1300-1500)

The situation during A.D. 1300-1500 does not appear to have differed significantly from that of the preceding phases. Fundamental continuities along several dimensions, especially the economic and settlement systems, have been demonstrated archaeologically by recent UIUC-WKY investigations at numerous Kentucky sites (Edging 1985; Lewis 1986; Stout 1985; Susenbach and Lewis 1987).

Major excavated components include the Adams town site (Lewis 1986; Lewis and Mackin 1984; Stout 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1987) along the Mississippi Valley edge in Kentucky, and the Callahan-Thompson and Hess hamlets in the Cairo Lowland (Lewis 1974, 1982). Other components for which there are important recent test excavation or surface-collected data include the

The Adams site is a large (7.25 ha) Mississippian town and ceremonial center located on an isolated terrace of the Lower Bayou de Chien Valley in Fulton County (Figures 3-3, 3-4). It consists of a central mound group, plaza, and two distinct village segments, one located to the east of the plaza and the other situated south of Mound A. The site was initially reported in 1888 by Loughridge, but it remained uninvestigated until 1983 when the University of Illinois began research there. Test excavations and other archaeological investigations have shown that the location contains major Late Woodland and Mississippian period components, including thick Dorena and Medley phase deposits.

In 1984, Stout (1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1987) completed a controlled surface collection of the entire site (2,257 five-m<sup>2</sup> collection units) exclusive of the

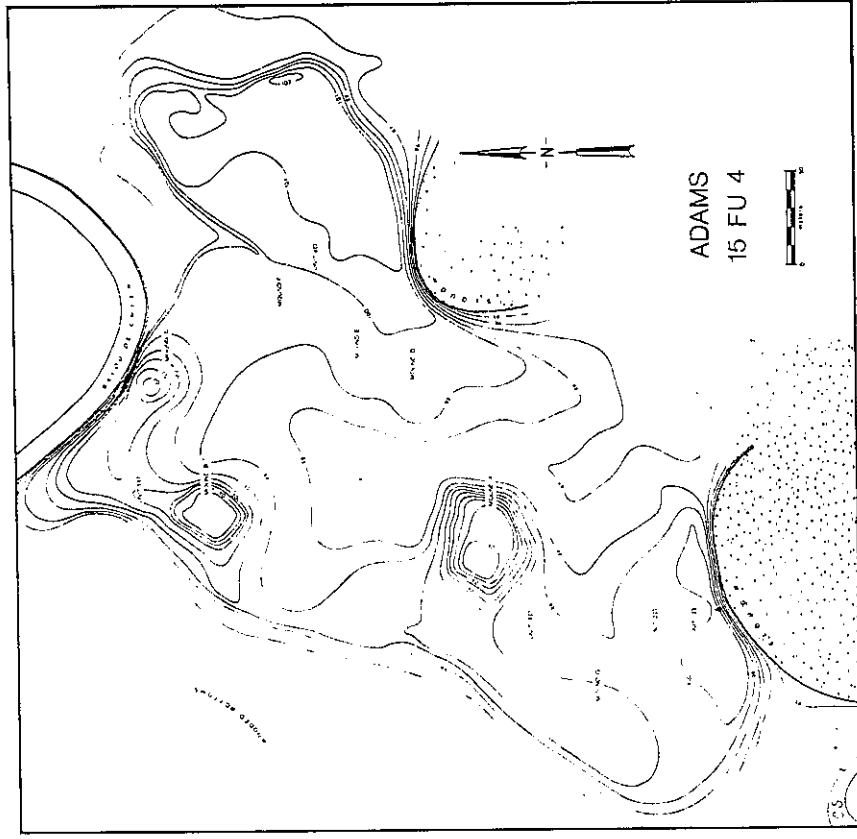


Figure 3-3. Topographic Map of the Adams Site (Stout 1985:11)

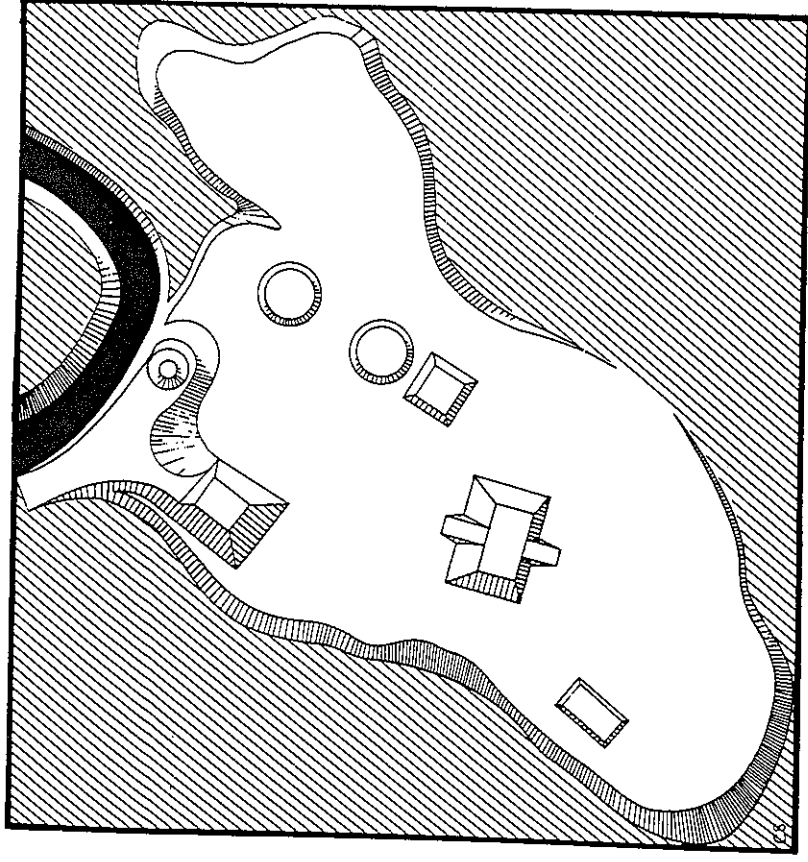


Figure 3-4. Reconstruction of the Adams Site Mound Group (courtesy of Charles B. Stout)

mounds. This project yielded data on the spatial patterning of approximately 100,000 artifacts, including about 35,000 potsherds. The analysis of those data, which began only recently after more than two and a half years of washing, cataloging, and sorting the massive artifact collection, promises to yield significant new insights into the organization of one late Mississippian period town, viewed as a case study for the Mississippian towns of the region.

As expected on the basis of our other investigations, preliminary tests of the surface-collection data show that most artifact class concentrations are strongly patterned in their distribution. High artifact densities were found on the east and west villages, along the low ridge that connects Mounds A and G, and along the southern edges of the three mounds (D-F) that flank the east side of the plaza (Figure 3-3). The large plaza, which is defined by

the placement of Mounds A-J and the small plaza, which lies next to the south side of Mound A, were kept relatively clear of village debris.

Midden development in the village segments is extensive and ranges from 1 to 1.5 m thick. In the Medley component, as in the rest of the archaeological record of this community, excavations have revealed evidence of numerous superimposed wall-trench houses, pits, fire basins, and other features (Figure 3-5). A great deal of information is available about the economy and food preferences of the site inhabitants. Cultivated plants included maize, beans, squash, gourds, and possibly several starchy or oily seeds, including goosefoot, erect knotweed, and maygrass (*Phalaris caroliniana*) (Edging and Dunavan 1986:98). Most of the maize cobs are 8- or 10-row varieties (Edging and Dunavan 1986:99). Gathered plant foods included persimmons and hickory nuts. White-tailed deer, raccoons, waterfowl, wild turkeys, turtles, and fish were the most commonly hunted animals.

The Medley phase pottery from the Adams component is typical of the phase as a whole. In this, as in older Mississippi components, most vessels are Mississippi Plain or Bell Plain utility wares. The incised types, Matthews Incised, *vars.* Beckwith, *Mattheus*, and *Manly*, Barton Incised, *vars.* Barton Incised, and *Kerf*, and O'Byam Incised, *vars.* O'Byam, are common relative to their representation in older components (Figures 3-6, 3-7). Nevertheless, decorated sherds seldom account for more than 3 to 5 percent of ceramic assemblages during the Mississippi period. The diversity of vessel shape modes also continues to increase slowly, but differences represent the elaboration of existing shape classes rather than the development of new vessel forms. Plates, mostly of a fine Bell paste, become common relative to preceding phases.

Nonpottery artifacts that are common on Adams and other late sites include recycled hoe fragments and resharpening flakes, projectile points, sandstone abraders, metates, adz fragments, bone awls, pottery ear spools and pins, and drills.

Across the river in the Cairo Lowland, investigations at two small villages or hamlets, the Callahan-Thompson and Hess sites (Lewis 1974, 1982), revealed the remains of late Medley and early Jackson phase wall-trench-type structures that had been constructed in old house basins that had been dug out and reused (Figure 3-8). The occupation at the Callahan-Thompson site was intensive enough to lead to the formation of a shallow midden. The ceramic assemblages of both hamlets are basically the same as that of the Adams component. The fundamental continuity of the settlement pattern from older phases can be seen in the strong association of Mississippi period habitation sites with the sandy loams of natural levee remnants (Lewis 1974). An important material culture difference appears to be the relative scarcity of

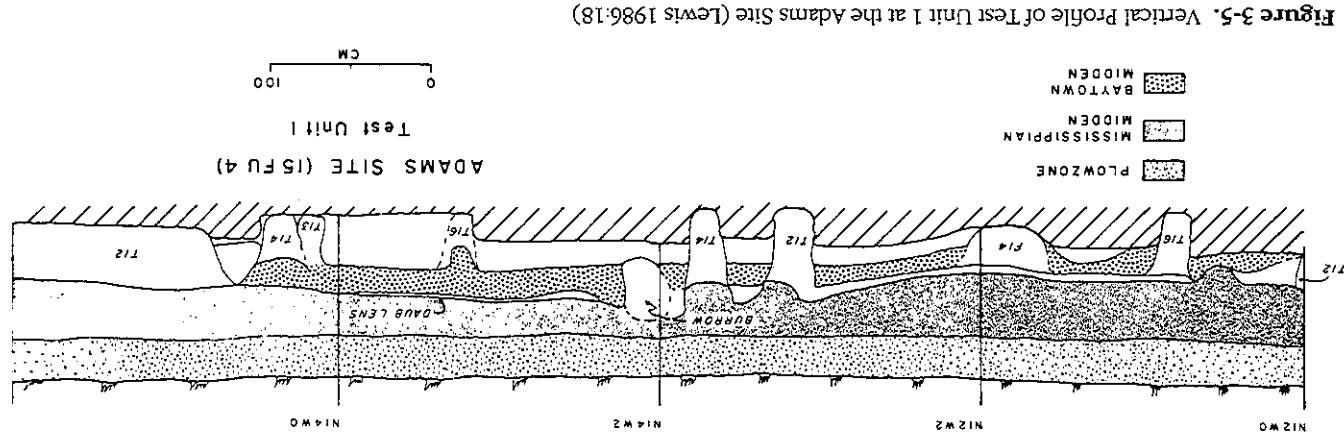


Figure 3-5. Vertical Profile of Test Unit 1 at the Adams Site (Lewis 1986:18)

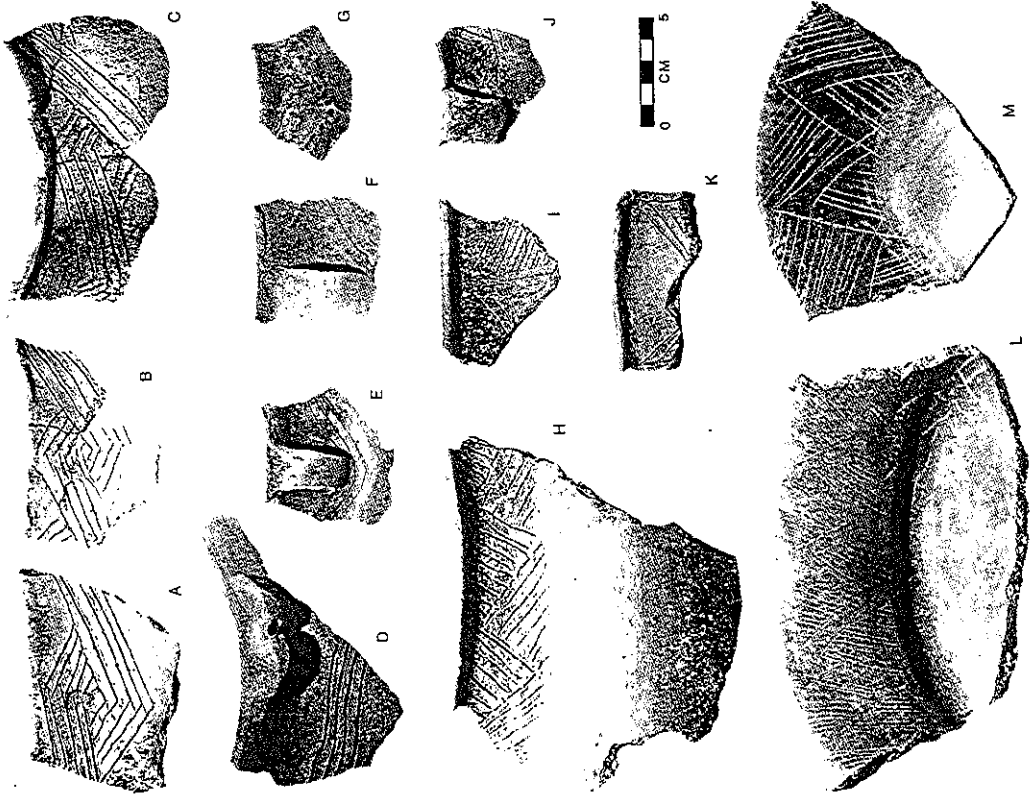


Figure 3-6. Late Mississippi Period Ceramics: a-c. Matthews Incised, *var.* *Beckwith*; d-c. Matthews Incised, *var.* *Matthews*; f-g. Matthews Incised, *var.* *Mamby*; h, j. Barton Incised, *var.* *Barton*; i, k. Barton Incised, *var.* *Kent*; l-m. O'Byam Incised, *var.* *O'Byam*.

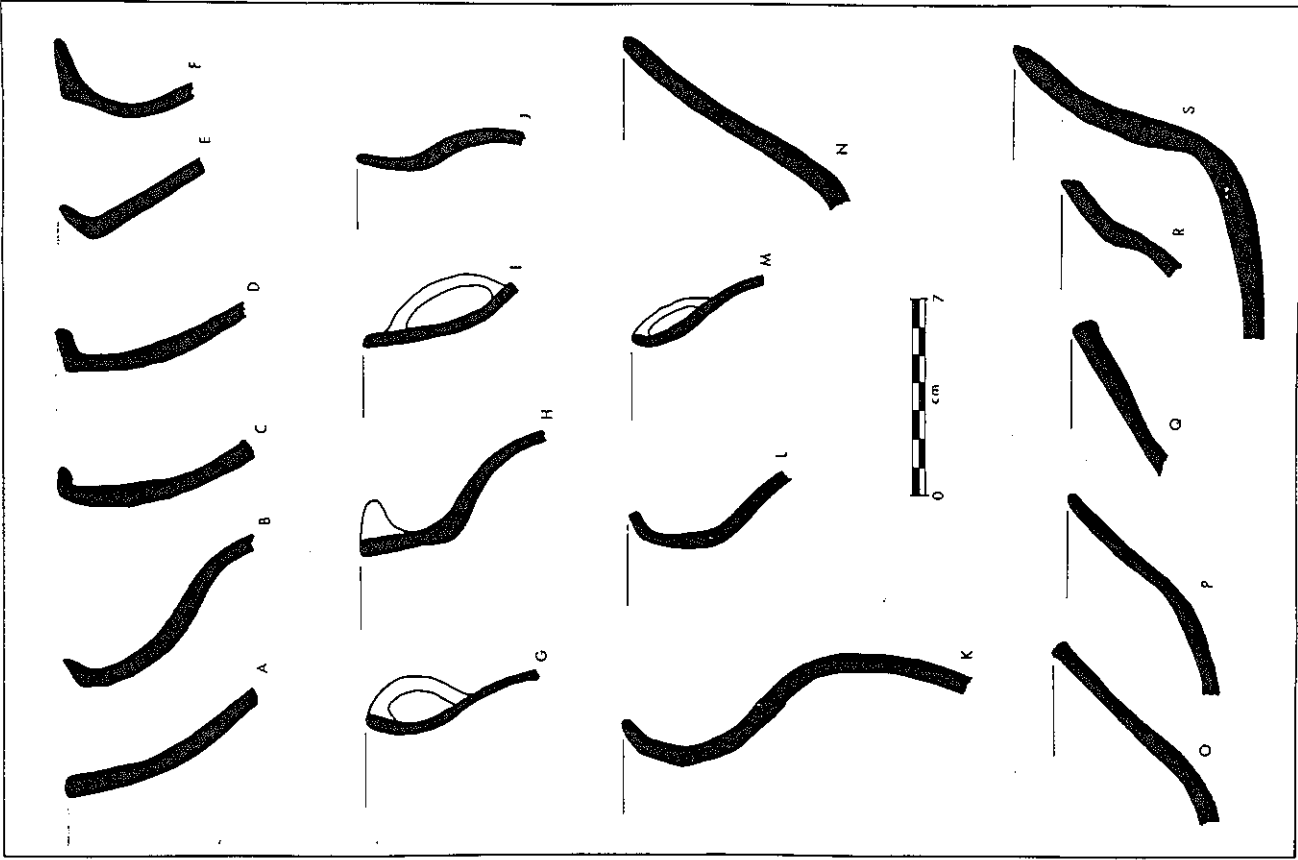


Figure 3-7. Rim Profiles: a-f. Matthews Incised, *var.* *Beckwith*; g-h. Matthews Incised, *var.* *Matthews*; i-j. Matthews Incised, *var.* *Mamby*; k-l. Barton Incised, *var.* *Barton*; m. Barton Incised, *var.* *Kent*; n-s. O'Byam Incised, *var.* *O'Byam*.

The subsistence economy of the hamlets also appears to have been essentially the same as that documented at Adams and comparable sites in this region. Apparent differences such as the absence of the starchy/oily seed complex and the relative scarcity of fish remains in the hamlets (Lewis 1974) are simply functions of sample recovery techniques. All of the soil samples from Callahan-Thompson and Hess were washed through window screen rather than being sent through a flotation process. The collections that resulted are therefore biased against small remains.

### Jackson Phase (A.D. 1500-1700)

This is the final aboriginal archaeological phase in the region. Its definition is consistent with my bias, described earlier, toward the construction of phases in which the temporal dimension is given greater priority than are bundles of diagnostic material traits of presumed contemporaneity. This point is crucial to understanding why the Jackson phase was defined: the temporal priority requires that the regional sequence span the entire record, including those intervals of time that are little known or poorly understood archaeologically.

The Jackson phase brackets the time interval during which many aboriginal populations across eastern North America became extinct, were decimated, or were otherwise affected culturally and biologically by introduced diseases from the Old World (cf. Ramenofsky 1982). It is also reasonable to assume that the local effects of those contacts occurred primarily during the 1500s. Ethnohistorical data from the late 1600s suggest that the aboriginal population density of this region was low and that it had been low for a long time (Lewis 1986).

In the Ohio-Mississippi confluence region, as in many other parts of the Southeast, the lifeways of native populations were profoundly affected by the events of those centuries. Towns, villages, and hamlets were abandoned as the inhabitants died from the combined effects of diseases, starvation, and exposure. The distinctive ceramic technology of the study region essentially ceased and left no stylistic successors.

There are few Jackson phase archaeological data to discuss, and given the nature of events that occurred during this phase and the prevailing dogma of our own discipline, significant new data may be slow to emerge. Among archaeologists working in the East, for example, there appear to be no clear-cut expectations concerning the archaeological characteristics of native communities that became extinct following contacts with Europeans or their diseases. How would those sites differ archaeologically from older sites of the same type? Among groups that survived the effects of this contact, what were

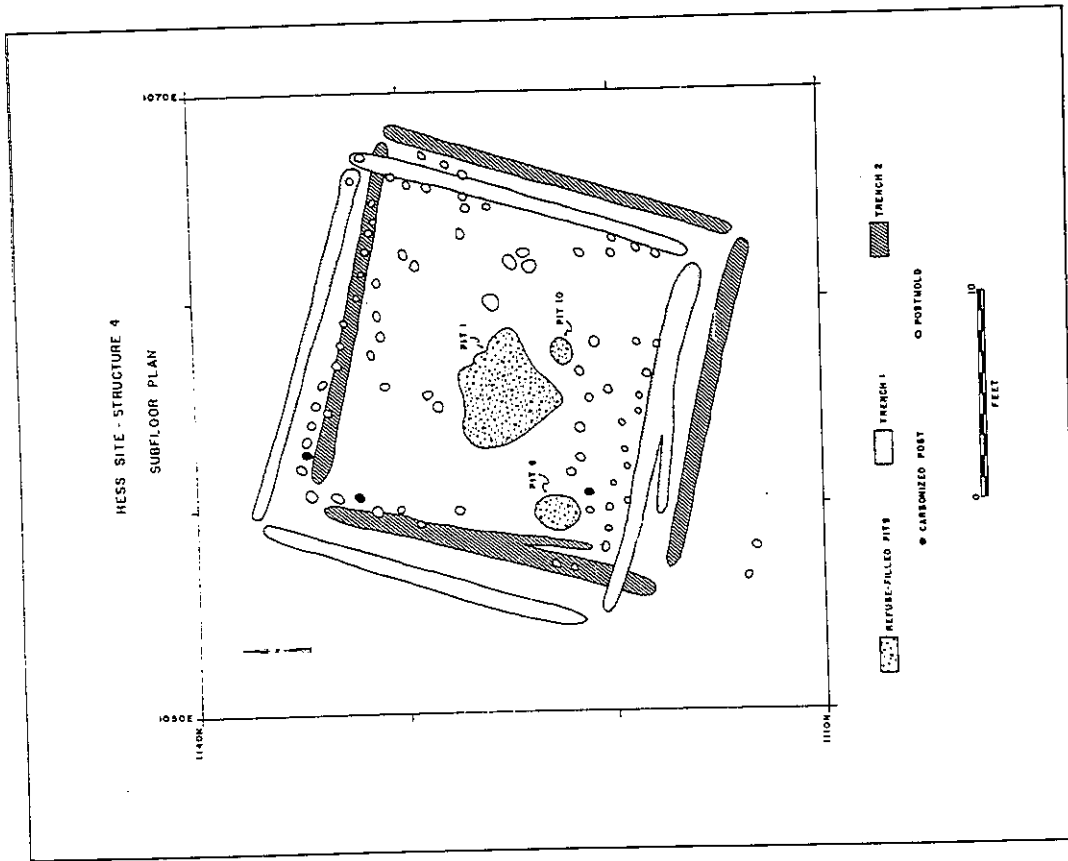


Figure 3-8. Plan of Subfloor Features, Structure 4, Hess Site (Lewis 1982:56)

stone artifacts and debitage on the Cairo Lowland sites and the extent to which those artifacts show greater evidence of recycling than material from comparable sites on or near the Mississippi Valley bluffs in Kentucky. This difference is easily explained by the absence of local stone sources in the Cairo Lowland and the presence of at least some sources along the Kentucky bluffs.



the economic, sociopolitical, and material culture changes? With a few notable exceptions, such as the recent dissertation by M. Smith (1984), these and other questions concerning the effects of contact have not yet been addressed in the East. They were not problems when most archaeologists agreed with the American Historical School's interpretation that the effects of contact were initially minimal. Now that this interpretation has been seriously questioned, if not largely discredited (Ramenofsky 1982), they loom large.

In this and adjacent regions, there are few data from town sites, a fact that the proponents of the "Vacant Quarter Hypothesis" interpret as support for the view that much of the Lower Ohio, Central Mississippi, and Northern Lower Mississippi valleys were abandoned by native populations prior to the beginning of the Jackson phase (Morse and Morse 1983; Williams 1980, 1982, 1985). On the basis of the analysis of test excavation and controlled surface-collection data, Lewis (1986) has argued that the occupations of the Adams and Sassafras Ridge towns extended into the Jackson phase but probably ended sometime during the first half of that phase. There is also a large Jackson phase component at Wolf Island, Missouri (ca. 15 km northwest of the Adams site), that has been mostly destroyed by looting and by the construction of farm buildings, a store, and houses. In their recent book, Morse and Morse (1983:299) describe this location as the "Hickman site" and attribute its existence to "reuse by hunters" of an older Mississippi period site. In spite of the fact that Morse and Morse attribute this interpretation to me, I have no reason to believe that the location was anything other than a large Mississippian village with a Jackson phase component, among others.

At the hamlet end of the settlement hierarchy the Hess and Callahan-Thompson sites both have Jackson phase components. The radiocarbon dates for the Hess site structures (Table 3-1) are the most recent age estimates for Native American dwellings in the region. I have always thought that they were particularly "strong" dates because they had been collected from different structures by different excavation teams and dated by different laboratories. I was also uneasy about them because they worked out to about A.D. 1600 in uncalibrated calendar years, and that seemed too recent as age estimates for cutting dates for wood from those contexts. The publication of a high precision calibration for the recent end of the radiocarbon time scale (Stuiver and Pearson 1986) clarifies matters greatly by demonstrating that the cutting dates could actually have been about A.D. 1500 with a 1 sigma range of A.D. 1440-1640.

The domestic architecture, economic organization, material culture, and other archaeologically delineable aspects of the most recent, and presumably terminal, occupations at the Hess and Callahan-Thompson sites show

no changes from the stable pattern of older Mississippi period occupations. There is no evidence of cultural stresses, no hint of impending disaster. The occupations appear merely to end. It is entirely possible that this abrupt, but almost orderly, truncation of the archaeological record may eventually prove to be among the few markers by which we are able to delineate regional extensions of native communities and populations in the century or two that followed the first landfall by Europeans in the New World.

In the study region, UIUC-WKY researchers are currently working with a model of the "Contact Era" in which it is assumed that the effects of initial contacts, probably all of an indirect nature, tended to be manifested in the archaeological record as abrupt changes. It is anticipated that those cultural changes will appear archaeologically to have occurred instantaneously even though the actual sequence of events may have been drawn out over decades.

If subsequent tests demonstrate that this model does not fit the culture contact effects in the study region, Jackson phase components will nevertheless continue to be difficult to find simply because this phase spans the terminal episode of prehistoric aboriginal occupations. Those components may bracket a brief interval of archaeological time. The material culture is also probably quite similar to Medley phase components except for a few artifacts such as astragalus dice, "Nodena" points, and disk pipes (Lewis 1987, 1988) and the possible, but frankly unlikely, occurrence of European artifacts. Many of Williams's (1980) diagnostic nonpottery artifacts for the Armorel phase in northeastern Arkansas should also be applicable in this region.

## Discussion

The Mississippi period in the Ohio-Mississippi confluence region is difficult to interpret in the Mid-South context. Part of the problem stems from the region's location in the Lower Mississippi Valley, which provided a central axis for the movement of people, goods, and ideas throughout prehistory. Given the nature of the geography of this massive valley, the logistics of communication were far easier up it and down it than between its walls. For example, assemblages from sites in southwestern Mississippi can be quite similar to contemporaneous assemblages in western Tennessee some 600 km up the valley, and yet they may be noticeably different from eastern Mississippi material only 200 km away. This loose pattern of intravalley cohesiveness breaks down, however, in the northern reaches of the Lower Valley (including the study region) and on the deltaic plain of coastal Louisiana.

Both of those peripheral regions were less Lower Valley-centered than the core, presumably because trade relations and other ties were maintained with a wider range of people whose lives were not inexorably linked to the Mississippi Valley.

The cohesiveness of the core may help to explain why some researchers who work in the Lower Mississippi Valley core may perceive the Ohio-Mississippi rivers confluence region as an aberrant place. Throughout the Mississippian period, communities situated around the mouth of the Ohio River shared far stronger material culture similarities (and, by implication, other aspects of their lifeways) with the inhabitants of the Tennessee and Cumberland valleys of western Kentucky and central Tennessee (Griffin 1952a; Lewis 1987; Thomas 1894; Thruston 1897) than with groups in the rest of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Viewed from the Memphis subarea, the study region lacks many of the major late Mississippian period ceramic types that are typical of Armored, Parkin, Walls, and other local phases. The absence of these ceramic types reflects differences in the cultural networks in which the communities of those regions participated and not, as some investigators have inferred, that the Ohio-Mississippi rivers confluence region lacks a significant late prehistory.

The latter view is reflected in the Morse and Morse (1983:271, 280) book on the Central Mississippi Valley and is compounded by errors in cross-dating Mississippian period assemblages from the study region with those of northeastern Arkansas. For example, Morse and Morse (1983:266-67) inferred that O'Byam Incised, *var.* O'Byam (Phillips 1970:144), and the plate vessel form occur early during the Mississippian period and drop out of the Northern Lower Valley sequence by about A.D. 1350. This interpretation apparently stems ultimately from the misclassification of similar but apparently older material from the Hazel and Cherry Valley sites in northeastern Arkansas. Regardless of the source of the errors, once those chronological links between the two regions were forged, it was reasonable to view the Ohio-Mississippi rivers confluence region sequence as terminating around A.D. 1400. It also explained why few late Mississippian period ceramic types of the Memphis subarea show up there.

Research completed by the UIUC-WKY project subsequent to the publication of the Morses' book has not supported their interpretations of the late prehistory of the study region. Numerous stratigraphic cuts and other data demonstrate unequivocally that O'Byam Incised, *var.* O'Byam, did not become common in assemblages until after about A.D. 1300 (Lewis 1986; Lewis and Mackin 1984). Plates occur in small numbers in Dorena (A.D. 1100-1300) assemblages but are most common during the Medley and Jackson phases. The important points that emerge from this example are these: first,

the relative scarcity of "late" types typical of the Lower Valley core does not necessarily imply the absence of a late prehistory in the study region; second, two regions can lie within reasonable geographical proximity to one another, but considerable cultural distance may occur between them; and third, cross-dating sequences between peripheral and core regions in the Lower Valley requires a greater level of stratigraphic control than similar comparisons within those regions.

If the study region's closest cultural ties are to the east rather than the south, what do those relationships look like during the late Mississippian period? I have addressed this question in detail elsewhere (Lewis 1986, 1987) and will offer only a few comments here. In the Tennessee-Cumberland region of the Jackson Purchase, the Tinsley Hill phase covers essentially the same centuries as the Medley and Jackson phases. The temporal cutpoints of this phase are not well defined inasmuch as it is primarily a cultural similarities-based unit rather than a temporal one, but a range of A.D. 1300-1600 is a reasonable estimate. There are several excavated components, including Tinsley Hill and Rodgers in the Cumberland Valley and Birmingham, Goheen, Roach, and possibly Jonathan Creek in the Tennessee Valley (Clay 1979). The settlement system and economy of Tinsley Hill communities appear to differ little from those of the older Jonathan Creek phase settlements in the region. Most of the pottery from those sites is Mississippian Plain or Bell Plain. The common decorated types are the several varieties of Matthews Incised and O'Byam Incised, *var.* *Stewart* (Clay 1979:123), although they account for only a minor proportion of any assemblage. Tinsley Hill, the phase's type site, was a village that covered ca. 7 ha of the Cumberland Valley floodplain and three low bluffs near the mouth of Eddy Creek. It may have been fortified. Several seasons of excavations in the early 1960s yielded data on the village, cemetery, and a substructure mound (Clay 1961, 1963a, 1963b; Schwartz 1961).

The radiocarbon dates associated with Tinsley Hill phase contexts are comparable to those for Medley and Jackson phase components (Lewis 1987:Appendix 1). Much of the discussion of those dates (e.g., Butler 1983; Clay 1979, 1984) has centered on the fact that they are simply too recent (in uncorrected calendar years) for the associated archaeological contexts. Calibration of the dates by the Stuiver and Pearson (1986) method removes the basis for those objections. The effective end of the aboriginal portion of the archaeological record appears to have occurred at roughly the same time in this region as around the mouth of the Ohio. There are a few artifacts, such as ground astragalus dice from the Tinsley Hill (Clay 1961:63) and the Stone sites in the Tennessee portion of the Barkley Reservoir (Coe and Fischer 1959), that occur in Jackson phase components and in sixteenth-century

contexts elsewhere in the Mid-South (Lewis 1988). Both regions, unfortunately, lie outside that part of the South in which one can realistically harbor hopes of recovering early European artifacts in association with interpretable aboriginal contexts.

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# 4

## Protohistoric/Early Historic Manifestations in Southeastern Missouri

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Most of the southeastern Missouri lowlands appear to have been abandoned during the Late Prehistoric period, ca. A.D. 1350–1450. Evidence of Protohistoric and Early Historic occupation, ca. A.D. 1550–1650, has been found only at a tightly clustered complex of relatively small sites situated along Pemiscot Bayou in the extreme southeastern part of the Missouri Bootheel. This pattern is in marked contrast to site frequency and distribution in southeastern Missouri ca. A.D. 1250–1350 when the Eastern Lowlands, Sikeston Ridge, the Malden Plain, and the Western Lowlands were blanketed with large, fortified civic-ceremonial centers and their outlying villages, hamlets, farmsteads, and extractive sites, evidencing a high population density and apparent exploitation of almost all arable sandy loam soil associations through the region (Price 1974). For some yet unexplained reason this seemingly stable settlement system and agrarian lifeway came to a rather abrupt end ca. A.D. 1350 (Price 1976:50). By ca. A.D. 1450 the great civic-ceremonial centers were completely abandoned and left to ruin. This abandonment phenomenon has been termed the “Vacant Quarter” (Williams 1985), and while it can be documented by the lack of Protohistoric sites around the mouth of the Ohio River and adjacent areas, the prime mover that brought it about can only be conjecture given the current data base. The Protohistoric manifestation that prevailed in the southeastern tip of southeastern Missouri after ca. A.D. 1550 exhibits a settlement pattern and material culture quite unlike that of the Mississippian populations of the region some 200 years earlier. These late sites exhibit affinities not to southeastern Missouri antecedents but to late complexes to the south. They are included in the Armored phase (Williams 1980) based on an assemblage of artifacts indicative of the Late Prehistoric/Protohistoric period centered in