

BOOK REVIEWS

Notes

¹ For another review of this book, see the essay by Charles Cobb in *Southeastern Archaeology* 18:76–77.

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Mississippian Towns and Sacred Spaces: Searching for an Architectural Grammar, edited by R. Barry Lewis and Charles B. Stout. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998. xvi + 304 pp., illus., tables, notes, bibliography. \$29.95 (paper).¹

Reviewed by Christopher B. Rodning

The ten chapters in this book reconstruct the layouts of late prehistoric towns in different parts of southeastern North America in an effort to better understand the cultural rules guiding these architectural arrangements in different parts of the Mississippian cultural landscape. Mississippian cultures flourished across the Southeast from AD 1000 to 1700. These were the chiefdoms whose descendants encountered Europeans beginning in the sixteenth century. The late prehistoric and protohistoric native peoples of western and southern North Carolina lived at an edge of this Mississippian cultural sphere in communities comparable to some of those described and interpreted in the chapters of this book.

I would characterize this book as the third of a lineage of major scholarly studies of Mississippian settlement patterns. The first is *Mississippian Settlement Patterns* (edited by Bruce Smith [1978]) with a

NORTH CAROLINA ARCHAEOLOGY [Vol. 50, 2001]

chapter by the late Roy Dickens about the late prehistoric and protohistoric settlement of western North Carolina), whose contributors outlined the relationships between different kinds of settlements in several cultural and natural provinces across the Southeast and Midwest to understand the ways that native chiefdoms adapted to different kinds of natural environments. The second is *Mississippian Communities and Households* (edited by Daniel Rogers and Bruce Smith [1995]), which built upon the foundation set by chapters in *Mississippian Settlement Patterns*, whose chapter authors concentrated on the spatial layout and social composition of Mississippian towns and the hamlets that in many parts of the Southeast were commonplace in the woods and old fields between towns. Chapters in *Mississippian Towns and Sacred Spaces* concentrate on the social implications of the ways that Mississippian towns were built and rebuilt during the centuries from AD 1000 to 1600 (see also Smith 1986:57–63 and Steponaitis 1986:387–393).

I would divide the chapters in this book into four groups of papers about the Mississippian cultural landscape. One pair of papers (Chapters 3 and 4) are those about towns in the greater southern Appalachians—eastern Tennessee and northern Georgia, which of course are relevant to archaeology in the western part of the Carolinas. Another set (Chapters 2, 5, and 6) are studies of towns in the lower Southeast—northern Florida and western Alabama, and the Lower Mississippi Valley. The third group (Chapters 7, 8, and 9) are studies of towns at the edge of the Midwest—western Kentucky and Ohio, and the greater Cahokian region of Illinois. The introductory and concluding chapters outline the main themes of the book and assess the collective significance of the case studies offered here—“Our goal is to understand the congruencies of design in time and space, the main elements of the designs, how and why these congruencies existed, and the regional variants, and, generally, to begin to answer questions about these towns that consider them more as *communities* than as archaeological sites, settlement patterns, site plans, or excavations” (see p. 2; italics in original).

The introduction develops the major premise of this book, which is that the architecture and layout of native towns and their arrangement across regional landscapes reflects widely shared cultural meanings. Contributors to the book certainly recognize the ecological factors that affected the settlement patterns that archaeologists study. Nevertheless their main interests here are the social dynamics within communities that guide the creation of different architectural spaces within them. The introduction sketches these themes and reviews related archaeological

BOOK REVIEWS

literature about household and community plans, before giving brief descriptions of each chapter that follows.

The concluding chapter characterizes Mississippian towns as architectural clues about Mississippian cosmology. Lewis and Stout argue that the layouts of these towns reflect greater social differentiation within these communities than was present within Woodland villages and the mounds sometimes associated with them. The mounds and plazas at the centers of Mississippian townships reflect both town planning and in some cases major landscaping projects by Mississippian groups. Their emphasis on plazas beside the more visible landmarks of mounds is a welcome contribution to the literature—these were likely the settings where some kinds of feasts and other communal rituals would have been held (see pp. 11–16). They argue convincingly that there were often rules guiding the ways that people entered and left town centers—whether guided by actual palisades and gates or by the arrangement of mounds and other buildings and landmarks (see pp. 16–19). One shortcoming of the book as a whole is the relative lack of consideration of town poles—hard to find archaeologically but architecture that would have been prominently visible landmarks of town centers or of spaces reserved for future moundbuilding (see pp. 8–9). Lewis and Stout comment that there is great variation in the longevity and architectural histories of Mississippian towns.

Reconstructing architectural histories of late prehistoric towns in the Southeast and Midwest and studying the ways they were rebuilt and abandoned is thus a valuable direction for further archaeological inquiry building upon the contributions of this book.

This topic does come to the fore in a chapter by David Hally and Hypatia Kelly about the town dating between AD 1500 and 1600 at the King site along the Coosa River in northwestern Georgia. They reconstruct household compounds at King—including summer houses and winter lodges, storage structures, and graves of household members—and they argue that the history of these households is visible in the archaeological record. Different kinds of evidence at King—overlapping arrangements of postholes from different architectural stages of houses, household hearths built and rebuilt atop burials of significant household members, the placement of newer buildings in cramped spaces between households and the town palisade—all show that the architectural spaces associated with specific household groups communicated something significant about the identity and history of these groups within the town.

The chapter by Gerald Schroedl adopts a broader chronological and spatial perspective on the development of Mississippian towns from AD 1000 to 1600 in the upper Tennessee Valley and lower Hiwassee Valley of

NORTH CAROLINA ARCHAEOLOGY [Vol. 50, 2001]

eastern Tennessee. Just before AD 1000, villages often were placed beside earlier communal burial mounds. Soon after AD 1000, platform mounds were built close to these palisaded villages and these early mounds. Gradually, people began planning these settlements with more rigidly defined rules of design, and distinct architectural spaces became associated with different members of increasingly hierarchical societies—these platforms often covered earlier forms of public architecture and supported new kinds of temples and chiefly residences. Eventually, graves were placed within and beside the buildings of these towns rather than at their edges, communicating the relationships between the dead with different groups within the community—the older distinction between space for the living and communal mound burials for the dead changed to reflect ties not between a community and *its* ancestors but the ties between groups *within* a community and the ancestors associated with them. By the sixteenth century, the architectural precursors to historic native council houses were moved off mounds, but they were still built beside plazas that separated these public buildings from the residential architecture and activity areas in villages. Throughout this period, hamlets and farmsteads may have been arranged in changing configurations across the landscape between towns, although further archaeological study of these trends and of the relationships among town residents and people living between towns is needed.

One set of chapters in the book are those about Mississippian towns in the lower Southeast. Claudine Payne and John Scarry offer a fascinating reconstruction of the town at the Lake Jackson mounds in northern Florida, arguing that the wealth and power of this Mississippian town stemmed from its role as a gateway for trade and exchange between Mississippian communities further northwest and Timucuan groups in peninsular Florida. They describe the layout of architectural spaces and graves at Lake Jackson and place this mound center at the top of the Mississippian settlement hierarchy in the historic homeland of the Apalachee (see Rogers and Smith 1995, Chapter 10). Their approach to town structure at the edge of the Mississippian landscape proper holds promise for the archaeological study of other edge communities like those in the Fort Ancient region in Ohio and those along the Arkansas River in Oklahoma (see Smith 1978, Chapters 6 and 7, and Rogers and Smith 1995, Chapters 4 and 10). Cameron Wesson draws from archaeology and Creek ethnohistory to interpret the layout of the multimound center at Moundville as a cosmological map of late prehistoric and protohistoric societies of western Alabama, arguing that Mississippian elites created a sacred landscape of mounds and plazas at Moundville to confirm and

BOOK REVIEWS

communicate their status to people living in the surrounding countryside and more distant provinces where Mississippian chiefdoms flourished (see Knight and Steponaitis 1998, Chapter 3). Tristram Kidder traces the development of Mississippian centers out of the earlier traditions of building and rebuilding mounds and plazas during the Woodland period along the lower reaches of the Mississippi, where aspiring Mississippian elites began to lay claim to mounds and plazas that before the tenth century had been communal gathering spaces for less sharply differentiated Woodland societies (see Steponaitis 1986:385–387). Here and in other regions are excellent opportunities for archaeologists to study not only the layouts of towns but the ways that household groups were dispersed across the landscape between mound centers at different points in the past.

Another group of papers in the book are those about Mississippian towns at the northern edge of what archaeologists call the Southeast. Charles Stout and Barry Lewis describe Mississippian towns in Kentucky and argue that town layouts were significantly affected by local topography and access to pathways for regional travel and communication. They take the presence of plazas as the diagnostic characteristic of Mississippian towns rather than clusters of mounds or households. Jon Muller compares Mississippian towns in southern Ohio to written descriptions of native towns in Alabama in the eighteenth century. One especially valuable insight developed in this essay is that Mississippian towns represented significant social entities rather than neatly bounded spatial entities. Scott Demel and Robert Hall interpret the Cahokian landscape of mounds and other landmarks in western Illinois as a cosmological map of the rigidly hierarchical Mississippian chiefdom centered there from the tenth through the fourteenth centuries. Their consideration of palisades and other wooden landmarks adds a valuable dimension to their reconstruction of the architecture and viewsheds of Cahokian mounds at and surrounding the paramount center itself. One value of these and other chapters of this book is that they look past the relationship between people and the natural environment to explore the ways that people created towns in areas where there are far more good locations for towns than bad ones (see pp. 232–239). Along most major rivers there would have been lots of room for farming households to spread out across the landscape (see pp. 64–66). And yet there were reasons why towns with and even some without mounds served as vital community centers for several generations and in some cases several centuries. Certainly there is much for archaeologists to learn from the variation in the layouts of towns and their architectural histories.

NORTH CAROLINA ARCHAEOLOGY [Vol. 50, 2001]

Archaeologists have often sought to identify distinct cultural groups, and to study patterns of interaction between them. Thus their focus has sometimes become archaeological cultures, their spatial distributions, and their chronological longevity. This approach to the archaeological record has its merits, especially because archaeologists rely on remnants of architecture and other artifacts to study the history of past societies, and archaeologists have to describe the variation they find in the archaeological record. However, native Southerners of the late prehistoric past certainly did not recognize themselves, nor differentiate their own groups from others, in the same ways that archaeologists have. Instead, people would have affiliated themselves with one or perhaps a group of Mississippian towns, each of which shared a common cultural background at some level but each of which had its own unique history. Archaeologists can contribute much towards deeper anthropological knowledge about Mississippian culture by studying the ecological and cultural history of individual towns and the landscapes surrounding them, and by continuing to differentiate the many kinds of towns and other settlements people built in different areas of the Southeast at different points in the past.

The chapters in the book are well written, and the maps in them complement their descriptions and interpretations. They fit together nicely, and they collectively cover much of the southeastern corner of the continent. Although there is not a chapter in this collection of essays about pre-Columbian towns in North Carolina, the book is a valuable contribution to archaeologists here. Mississippian towns were present in the Appalachian Summit region of southwestern North Carolina and in the Catawba River Valley (Ward and Davis 1999:158–192). Mississippian communities were centered at Town Creek and probably other sites in the southern Piedmont (Anderson 1994; Coe 1995; Ward and Davis 1999:123–124). *Mississippian Towns and Sacred Spaces* outlines problems in studying the layouts of settlements that are applicable to the study of Mississippian towns in North Carolina as well as the study of villages associated with different cultural traditions. Chapters in this interesting and very readable book are fascinating reviews of the architectural and social histories of Mississippian towns in the Southeast. These studies contribute much to our knowledge of how historically known towns and groups of towns formed as such during the 1600s and 1700s.

BOOK REVIEWS

Notes

¹ For another review of this book, see the essay by Mark Williams in *Southeastern Archaeology* 18:73–74.

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