



MISSISSIPPIAN
COMMUNITIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

EDITED BY J. DANIEL ROGERS AND BRUCE D. SMITH

*Mississippian
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and Households*

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J. Daniel Rogers and
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Acknowledgments

TO BEGIN THE process of synthesizing some of the current work concerning domestic-level organization in the Mississippian Period, the editors chaired a symposium titled "Households and Settlements in the Mississippian Period" at the Society for American Archaeology meetings in Atlanta in the spring of 1989. This book is a product of that symposium. Although some of the original participants of the symposium have dropped out, others have joined the enterprise to maintain a diversity of geographical coverage and methodological approaches. In putting this volume together the editors found the enthusiasm and dedication of each chapter author to be the mainstay of seeing it through to completion.

Although we leave it to individual authors to acknowledge the assistance they received in preparing their chapters, several individuals who have contributed to assembly of the entire volume deserve special acknowledgement. We wish to thank Karen Dohm for innumerable instances of assistance. She helped with everything from sentence structure to the theoretical intricacies of spatial organization. We also thank Jane McMullan and Mary Goodman, both of whom came late to the project but provided that final push and attention to detail much needed to get the manuscript into an acceptable form. To achieve a certain level of uniformity, all of the original illustrations were either drafted or revised by the expert hand of Marcia Bakry. Working with Judith Knight and the other editors and production staff at the University of Alabama Press was to experience a model of professionalism and easygoing efficiency.

J. Daniel Rogers
Bruce D. Smith

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Introduction

J. Daniel Rogers

Start from a concrete reality—a local group of people—rather than from an abstract reality—such as the concept of lineage or the notion of kinship system. (Leach 1961:104)

DURING THE MISSISSIPPIAN period (approx. A.D. 1000–1600) of the eastern United States, a variety of greater and lesser chiefdoms took shape. Archaeologists have for many years explored the nature of these chiefdoms (also encompassed by the term “middle-range societies”), from their basic subsistence practices to the outlines of pan-regional ideological systems (Brown 1989; Smith 1986). While many of these investigations include an interest in the organization of the household and community, most see the analytical focal point at either a greater or lesser scale—perhaps in the analysis of regional trade networks or, by contrast, in the lithic reduction strategies employed at a particular site. Most archaeologists, in one way or another, express a concern with domestic activities, for it is after all the trash from these very activities that we spend huge amounts of time analyzing, reporting, and debating. But this concern may be applied variously in the service of topics ranging from the study of vast settlement systems to individual activity areas, generally without reference to concepts like household or coresidential group. Some recent work, however, has discovered the value of an explicit and formalized examination of domestic activities through study of the operation of small social groups, generically referred to as households (e.g., Ashmore and Wilk 1988; Baudry 1991; Blanton 1993; Wilk and Rathje 1982). Rather than constituting a criticism of other analytical strategies, the focus on the workings of small social groups seeks only to adjust the magnifying glass to pinpoint the forces that shape the family and related groups. There is ample justification for this, considering that archaeology explores many long-term changes that are candidly revealed in the short-term changes found in the organization of households.

Spotlighting increasingly detailed contexts such as the household may only seem to lead us into triviality and away from interpretive relevance. If for the moment we accept that such a trend is real, then we must ask how archaeology

as a whole can avoid the blight of minutiae that seems to be affecting anthropology in general (e.g., Trigger 1982:1-2), as well as virtually all fields of inquiry. Perhaps an inverse relationship exists between quantity and detail of information and breadth of interpretation, or perhaps as the amount of information we have access to increases, our ability to synthesize beyond the local decreases. Is it possible that we are hopelessly mired in our own data?

This is a question that all scientific and technological societies must wrestle with, but it also deserves some answer when considering the scope of particular areas of research. This trend is part of the shift to explicit problem-oriented research and recognition of the complexities of archaeological and other kinds of information. Normative archaeology once allowed grand synthesis because variation could be more or less ignored. Old Archaeology, New Archaeology, Postmodern Archaeology—there is no going back to a less data-intensive time. The models and interpretations are sometimes particularistic and sometimes cross-cultural, but there is always the requirement to refine interpretation through better data. This in turn inevitably means more detail. But does searching for more and better details really mean that we no longer see above the rim of the trench in which we happen to stand? We have, in fact, accepted the challenges of doing archaeology. The problems that derive from this acceptance are complex, and the analyses must of necessity match this complexity. This does not negate interpretive progress; one may look around and easily see that significant issues are being addressed. The contributions to this volume are a good example. While each author is firmly on the trail of more and better information, there is also a commitment to larger interpretive issues. Some may question the refinement of details, but in actuality the finer degree of resolution permits better interpretation and actually enhances the commitment to large-scale goals. There is every reason to expect that this focus on households will serve well our goals of understanding issues of culture change and organization.

The intentions of this volume also derive from an emerging need to compare the regional diversity that existed in Mississippian chiefdoms. This contributes to an expanding body of information highlighting variability in chiefdom organization—in contrast to prevailing notions of uniformity. The contributors to this volume examine the diversity in chiefdom organization through the basic economic and social units of Mississippian society by exploring the functional differences in domestic material assemblages, the relationship of homesteads to larger-order communities, and the organizational complexity within communities, as well as regional differences. Each of these topics contributes to an overall understanding of the pivotal role of the household in Mississippian and other middle-range societies.

An earlier volume titled *Mississippian Settlement Patterns*, edited by Bruce Smith (1978), defined the significance of settlement systems from a regional perspective and provided the archaeological community a simple way of assessing new information in a comparative framework. The present volume is a logical next step that moves the scale of investigation down to the level of the community and household. This step has become feasible only in recent years due to an increased number of investigations at the community rather than ceremonial center level. In some areas this basic work has contributed to major revisions of settlement hierarchy concepts.

Clearly, there is much to be gained from in-depth analysis of domestic organization. The chapters in this volume contribute to this need for detailed analysis by employing varied approaches that point toward comprehension of economic and social interactions at both the intra- and inter-site levels. Some chapters emphasize a regional coverage that builds the potential for comparison of broad patterns of similarity and diversity within middle-range societies. Other chapters offer theoretical and methodological refinements for recognizing patterns of basic organization within a site or a small number of sites.

Organization of the Volume

Following this introduction, the volume begins with a chapter that reviews the scope of archaeological analyses of domestic organization and continues with a series of chapters that concentrate on particular sites or regions. The book concludes with a chapter discussing some of the central analytical problems in research on Mississippian households.

While specific studies on the many aspects of household organization have proliferated, relatively few of them attempt to summarize the theoretical and methodological scope of this growing field. In the first chapter, J. Daniel Rogers reviews some of the major themes that fall under the heading of Household Archaeology. Using a worldwide set of examples, Rogers looks at how households have been defined and at the substantive issues of spatial analysis, social and population dynamics, subsistence, and other related economic activities. As a prelude to subsequent chapters, this general discussion narrows to a focus on previous studies of Mississippian households in the Midwest and Southeast.

Following this broader discussion of domestic organization, the next two chapters concentrate on the Midwest, including the Cahokia region and Ohio. In the Cahokia region of Illinois, Mark W. Mehrer and James M. Collins tackle the problem of understanding the changes that take place in households with the evolution of town life. Working with information from Cahokia and other sites in the region, they use households to explore the intricacies of social