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Bense, Judith A. *Archaeology of the Southeastern United States. Paleoindian to World War I.* San Diego: Academic Press, Inc., 1994 (paperback). 388 pp.

Pauketat, Timothy R. *The Ascent of Chiefs, Cahokia and Mississippian Politics in Native North America.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994 (paperback). 229 pp.

Welch, Paul D. *Moundville's Economy.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, (paperback). 227 pp.

Rogers, J. Daniel, and Bruce D. Smith, eds., *Mississippian Communities Households.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995. (Paperback). 310 pp.

Dye, David H. and Cheryl Anne Cox, eds., *Towns and Temples along the Mississippi.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990. (Paperback) . 292 pp.

These are books about the Mississippians. The term "Mississippian" has several definitions, referring to an archaeological stage of development in North America, to the people who were part of that archaeological stage, to the cultural trait list for the stage as determined by excavation, and even to the economic system, political system, and religious ideas suggested by that trait list. The area and period so defined vary depending on who is talking about what, but roughly they involve the southeastern United States from St. Louis south to the Gulf coast, reaching west into Oklahoma and Texas, and east along the Ohio River (or, better, the Cumberland River) to the east coast, from AD 1000 to 1500.

Why should the members of this society care about the Mississippians?

The straightforward answer is that understanding comes more easily when study begins with early, simple examples. Complexity breeds uncertainty. The Mississippians were not so

early and simple that no arguments arise, but at least most of those arguments involve archeological questions that do not arise in most studies of more developed cultures. The period was Neolithic; that is, it included a developed subsistence agriculture, polished stone tools, and pottery. In economic terms it is roughly comparable to the Near East about 5000 BC or Mexico about 1000 BC. But for civilizationists, the Mississippians present two enormous advantages. They were recent enough that a much higher percentage of their remains survives than for other Neolithic cultures. And they were located in the United States, which has a much greater number of aspiring field archeologists per square mile than any other area of autonomous Neolithic development (possibly excepting Japan). Those field archeologists have to write books and papers about something, so the amount of literature available to the outsider on Mississippian development probably outstrips that for the entire rest of the Neolithic world combined (possibly excepting Japan and Mesoamerica). And there is one other incidental advantage. This is home. We have a different civilization, or lots of remains from one, right on our doorstep, available to exercise our minds on any easy weekend if you live in the southeast, and fairly accessible from the rest of the country. If we want to practice our comparativism by some other method than delving in libraries, this is the most convenient way to do it.

Proceeding in order from the early to the late and from the general to the particular, Bense's book is a general study of archaeology in the southeastern United States from the first arrival of people into the present century. It is full of maps and diagrams and, being intended for an introductory course in the field, easy to understand. The book is arranged by "stage," each stage being basically a level of technological development as reflected in the archaeological material. There are six such stages, the last three being "Mississippian Stage: A.D. 1000-1500" divided into three periods each one of which is addressed separately, "European Stage: A.D. 1500-1821" divided into Contact and Colonial periods, and "American Stage: A.D. 1821-

1917” divided into Antebellum and Victorian periods. Within each period the information is addressed topically, for example “Middle Mississippian Period: Sociopolitical Developments” and “Antebellum Period: European-American and African-American Culture.” Those last two sections are, obviously, historic periods; as Bense says, “archaeology is archaeology... regardless of the age of the deposits.” These chapters provide a great deal of information one does not normally find in history books, simply because the study is made from the archaeologist’s point of view. Of the five books reviewed here, this one is most recommended to the outside scholar just becoming acquainted with archaeology.

Timothy Pauketat’s *The Ascent of Chiefs* is less a standard archaeological study (though there is a great deal of that) than a presentation of an analytical hypothesis. One of the great arguments in American archaeology is over the nature of the Mississippian polity. It sometimes seems that new hypotheses are presented at almost every conference. As with many new hypotheses, such words as “probably,” “inferred,” and “indications” appear rather often. And Pauketat can be difficult to read. Consider three early sentences:

The prospect of a contradictory consciousness is that subordinate resistance to dominant ideologies is always present and the source of conflicting thoughts and actions. The divergent, opposed, or conflicting thoughts of human agents, in turn, can lead to the departure from tradition or cultural transformation mentioned earlier. Such a cultural-historical process would have mediated change in nonstate chiefly formations. [Pauketat 1994:16]

The meaning is there, but this is not a book to be skimmed with half your mind on the evening news. However, using Cahokia as the primary site in evidence, it does provide a great deal of thought and information on the process of centralization of an economically primitive hierarchical polity.

Next are two exercises in archaeological economics, Paul Welch’s *Moundville’s Economy* and Daniel Dye’s and Bruce

Smith's *Mississippian Communities and Households*. Welch is primarily concerned with creating an economic model for Mississippian times, based on data from one of the largest sites, Moundville, on the Black Warrior River near Tuscaloosa, Alabama. It had a central area population of perhaps 2,000. He goes into considerable detail on who made and used what, for example identifying and mapping every bone from every wild animal consumed by the Moundville people. But there is always the argument whether such material reflects genuine economic differences or merely the nature of the deposits themselves. Welch suggests that his model remains tentative and, being based on data mostly from Moundville and its dependencies, may apply only to that group. The book includes some remarks that this reviewer found surprising: for example, that, in an age where stone blades are major components of the definition "Neolithic," they actually comprise only a small proportion of the cutting edges used in the Southeast. "Undoubtedly knives of shell, stone, and perhaps bone were employed, but cane or reed knives are the only aboriginal implements of this kind to be widely noted. They appear to have been in use everywhere throughout the [Southeast]. [Welch 1991:153, quoting John Swanton, 1946, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States* (Washington, DC: Bureau of American Ethnology, *Bulletin* 137, p 564)."]

J. Daniel Rogers and Bruce D. Smith's book *Mississippian Communities and Households* is a collection of essays in settlement archaeology. It addresses mainly building patterns, both individual structures and town and village arrangements, and support functions. It is not a book for someone just beginning to study the field. But for anyone interested in the detailed possibilities of urban history, this will provide quite a lot of information on how houses and towns are set up in a technological period when houses are not a very old concept and towns are just beginning to make their appearance. It would also be convenient to have on the library shelves for a quick cross-reference with other books on the period.

David Dye's and Cheryl Cox's *Towns and Temples along the*

Mississippi is also a collection of essays, addresses development along the river mostly (180 pp.) from 1350 to 1500, mostly discussing data from specific cultures (herein, "phases"). It includes two chapters that are an education in what archaeological evidence can say about the health of a population and one very good discussion of the Mississippian in general. This makes a useful comparison with Bense above. There are also chapters on problems archaeologists face, regarding for example reconstructing the route and impact of the de Soto (Spanish) exploration and reconstructing the relationship between archaeological and historic Indians. Of the books reviewed here, this one is recommended second in its usefulness to the nonarchaeologist who is interested in gathering a little knowledge about Neolithic cultures.

Overall, these books provide quite a lot of information and analysis on the best-known case of a culture area just moving toward civilization, and should be consulted by anyone who wants to bone up on that problem. The focus is not always what the historian or social scientist would wish; archaeology, after all, has a different set of questions. I particularly regret the short shrift given to the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex, which is the archaeological assemblage that reflects the Mississippian peoples' belief system. However, there are other books on that, most recently Patricia Galloway's *The Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: Artifacts and Analysis* (1989). Meanwhile, these books should be part of the college library of any comparativist who wants to have a minimal knowledge of early civilizations, and Bense should be on the personal shelf of anyone interested in the possibilities of archaeology for researching civilization as a general issue.

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