

# **The Archaeology of Villages**

IN EASTERN NORTH AMERICA

Edited by Jennifer Birch and Victor D. Thompson

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## Contents

List of Illustrations vii

Foreword: Crafting Community and Identity in the Eastern Woodlands ix  
*David G. Anderson*

1. The Power of Villages 1  
*Victor D. Thompson and Jennifer Birch*
2. Collective Action and Village Life during the Late Archaic on the Georgia Coast 20  
*Victor D. Thompson*
3. Powers of Place in the Predestined Middle Woodland Village 36  
*Neill Wallis*
4. Size Matters: Kolomoki (9ER<sub>1</sub>) and the Power of the Hypertrophic Village 54  
*Shaun E. West, Thomas J. Pluckhahn, and Martin Menz*
5. When Villages Do Not Form: A Case Study from the Piedmont Village Tradition—Mississippian Borderlands, AD 1200–1600 73  
*Eric E. Jones*
6. Initial Northern Iroquoian Coalescence 89  
*Jennifer Birch and Ronald F. Williamson*
7. The Path to the Council House: The Development of Mississippian Communities in Southeast Tennessee 106  
*Lynne P. Sullivan*
8. The Village Remains the Same: A Fort Ancient Example 124  
*Robert A. Cook*
9. Population Aggregation and the Emergence of Circular Villages in Southwest Virginia 140  
*Richard W. Jefferies*

10. The Power of Powhatan Towns: Socializing Manitou in the Algonquian Chesapeake 160  
*Martin D. Gullivan, Christopher J. Shephard, and Jessica A. Jenkins*
11. From Nucleated Villages to Dispersed Networks: Transformations in Seneca Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Community Structure, circa AD 1669–1779 174  
*Kurt A. Jordan*
12. It Took a Childe to Raze the Village 192  
*Charles R. Cobb*

List of Contributors 205

Index 207

## Illustrations

### FIGURES

- i. Locations of case studies discussed in text x
- 2.1. LiDAR topographic map of the Sapelo Shell Ring Complex 21
- 2.2. Map of the Georgia Coast 27
- 3.1. Locations of circular and U-shaped Middle Woodland villages 37
- 3.2. Simplified site plans at Kolomoki, Garden Patch, and McKeithen 43
- 3.3. Topography of the Garden Patch site 45
- 4.1. The locations of Kolomoki and other sites mentioned in the text 55
- 4.2. Pluckhahn's systematic sitewide grid 57
- 4.3. The approximate extent of Kolomoki's village areas 60
- 5.1. Wall site excavation plan, 1938–2016 75
- 5.2. Map of the Piedmont Southeast 77
- 5.3. Map of post mold and pit feature distribution at the Redtail site 79
- 6.1. Early Iroquoian village plans, ca. AD 1000–1250 92
- 6.2. Iroquoian village plans, ca. AD 1250–1350 95
- 6.3. Semisubterranean sweat lodges 98
- 7.1. Hamilton burial mound and Late Woodland rotunda 108
- 7.2. Platform mound summits of the Hiwassee Island and Dallas phases 110
- 7.3. Middle Cumberland–related artifacts from southeast Tennessee 113
- 7.4. Calibrated ranges for Hiwassee Island dates 114
- 7.5. Dallas site plan map, Hamilton County, Tennessee 116
- 8.1. The Fort Ancient and Middle Mississippian culture regions showing sources of migrations 126
- 8.2. Fort Ancient village structure over time 127
- 8.3. Comparison of Fort Ancient village form with Woodland enclosures present in the culture region 129
- 8.4. Mississippian gorget 131
- 8.5. Comparison of SunWatch village plan with those of select Dhegiha Siouan cultures 135



# 4

## Size Matters

### Kolomoki (9ER1) and the Power of the Hypertrophic Village

SHAUN E. WEST, THOMAS J. PLUCKHAHN, AND MARTIN MENZ

By definition and etymology, the term “village” refers to a cluster or collection of houses, smaller than a town or city but larger than a hamlet (Darvill 2003:456; Oxford University Press 2016; see also Thompson and Birch, this volume). Explicit within this typical definition is the dimension of size, and archaeologists have thus usually classified settlements as villages based on the areal extent of material remains. However, the definition of a village as a “cluster” or “collection” of houses also implies a certain density, and this dimension adds to the conceptual burden as the houses within a single village may be separated by spaces used for agricultural fields, plazas, or monuments. The struggle over variability in the density of house remains within villages is indicated by the rather tortured terminology employed in some of our most seminal settlement pattern studies. For the Virú Valley, Gordon Willey (1953:7) identified at least three categories of villages: the “scattered small-house village,” the “agglutinated village,” and the “compound village.” William Sanders (1965:50) separated the villages in his survey of the Teotihuacán Valley into three types: the “scattered village,” the “compact low-density village,” and the “high-density compact village.” Jeffrey Parsons (1971:22) settled for four varieties of village in his survey of Texcoco: “small nucleated village,” “large nucleated village,” “small dispersed village,” and “large dispersed village.” Willey, at least, and probably not alone, was well aware of the arbitrary nature of these definitions:

A past inhabitant of Virú approaching his home, in a compact cluster of similar homes, might have thought of the whole as his “village.” As such it was a unit of space and structure with meaning for him. But did he consider the similar house cluster 200 meters distant as “his village” or “another village”? Similarly, he must have had certain thoughts about the pyramidal mound

500 meters down the quebrada, but we do not know if he conceived of it as part of “his village,” or a part of someone else’s village, or an isolated entity. Perhaps he did all of these, quite naturally, in the different compartments of his consciousness. The significant thing is that there are different orders of function. In some contexts the house is meaningful, in others the immediate cluster of houses, and so on, through larger communities. Certainly, for some purposes the whole of Virú must have been considered as a single settlement unit. . . . We can, then, only approximate what was once meaningful in our functional classification. (Willey 1953:6)

We take this chapter as an opportunity to introduce yet another term—the hypertrophic village—to the already confusing lexicon. By “hypertrophic,” we mean a village of deliberately exaggerated size, as the moniker has been occasionally employed to describe anomalously large or ornate examples of otherwise relatively mundane classes of artifacts, typically with the implication that the objects would be poorly

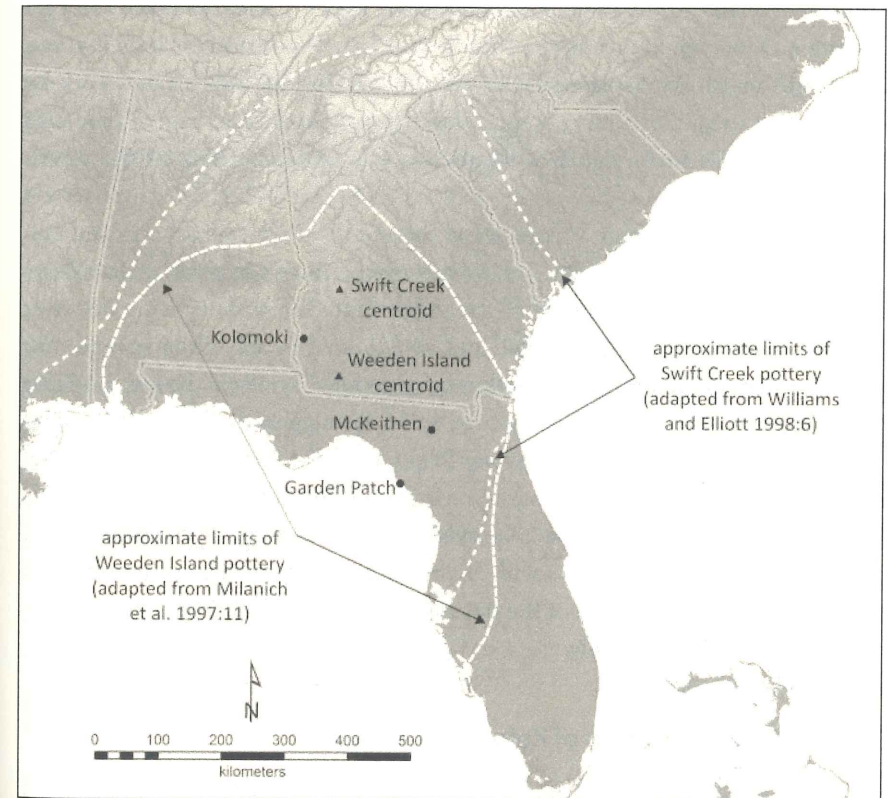


Figure 4.1. The locations of Kolomoki and other sites mentioned in the text and the distributions of the Swift Creek and Weeden Island pottery traditions.



suiting for any utilitarian purpose (e.g., Anderson 2012:101; Clark 1996:193; Dye 2009:62; Emerson and McElrath 2009:33; Gilmore 2016:117; Malinowski 1934:193; Marceaux and Dye 2007:167–168; McElrath et al. 2009:347; Pauketat 1997:7; Sassaman 2005:83–87; Sassaman and Randall 2007:196). For example, in what may be the original use of the term in reference to material culture, Malinowski (1934:193) described the tendency among the native people of Papua New Guinea to craft objects that are “strikingly big, or strikingly well-finished, or of a strikingly fine material, even though in the process the article were to become unwieldy, breakable, and good for nothing else but display.” We offer the designation not as a functional classification, but instead as a closer approximation of the meaning that may have attuned to particularly large villages by the sort of villager described by Willey (1953). We also use the expression with the aim of ascribing agency to both the residents of hypertrophic villages and the villages themselves, the latter point drawing on Kidder’s (2011:110–111) observation that “to many indigenous peoples, the landscape is a real thing with power to influence events and actions.”

We use the term “hypertrophic village” specifically in reference to the Kolomoki site (9ER1) in the lower Chattahoochee Valley of southwestern Georgia (Figure 4.1), occupied during the Middle and Late Woodland periods (ca. 200 BC to AD 1050). As summarized in the section that follows, recent work by Pluckhahn (2003, 2010a, 2011, 2015), Menz (2015), and West (2016) (see also Pluckhahn et al. 2018) significantly revises our understanding of the development of the village at Kolomoki, and suggests that a shift from a relatively compact to a hypertrophic village began around the sixth century AD and culminated a century or two later. The power of Kolomoki’s hypertrophic village, we argue, lies within the sprawl of the settlement. The wide spacing between sections of the village both enabled and constrained social cohesion, and may have afforded the community at Kolomoki unrivaled symbolic power. Looking to recent work at other sites by our colleagues, we suggest that the construction of Kolomoki’s hypertrophic village was likely related to concomitant settlement shifts taking place throughout the region in the mid-to-late seventh century AD. We begin with a brief overview of previous understandings of village development at Kolomoki, follow this with the results of our new investigations, and then discuss the significance of the hypertrophic village and the possible extension of the term more widely.

### Previous Understandings of Kolomoki’s Village

The unique scale of Kolomoki was established as early as the middle 1800s when the number, size, and extent of its mounds were first mapped by antiquarians

and archaeologists (e.g., Jones 1873; McKinley 1873; Palmer 1884; Pickett 1851; White 1854). Later work by William Sears (1951a, 1951b, 1953, 1956) revealed the elaborate nature of Kolomoki’s burial mounds, but his excavations in the village were underreported. Sears’s treatment of the site was further flawed by his misclassification and inversion of the ceramic chronology, which forced the dominant occupation into the Mississippian period when large villages with platform mounds became more common in the region (Knight and Schnell 2004; Pluckhahn 2003, 2007, 2010b; Sears 1992; Trowell 1998).

Pluckhahn’s (2003) site-wide investigations began nearly a half century later. Systematic testing of the off-mound areas revealed the expansive extent of the site’s residential debris (Figure 4.2). Whereas previous depictions by Sears (1953:Figure 82, 1956:Figure 21) suggested that Kolomoki’s village was focused on the site’s central plaza, Pluckhahn (2003) demonstrated that this “near-plaza” artifact scatter (or “inner village,” as we refer to it here) was paralleled by a larger, and generally denser ring of residential debris nearly a kilometer in diameter (which we refer to as the “outer village”). Subsequent excavations in

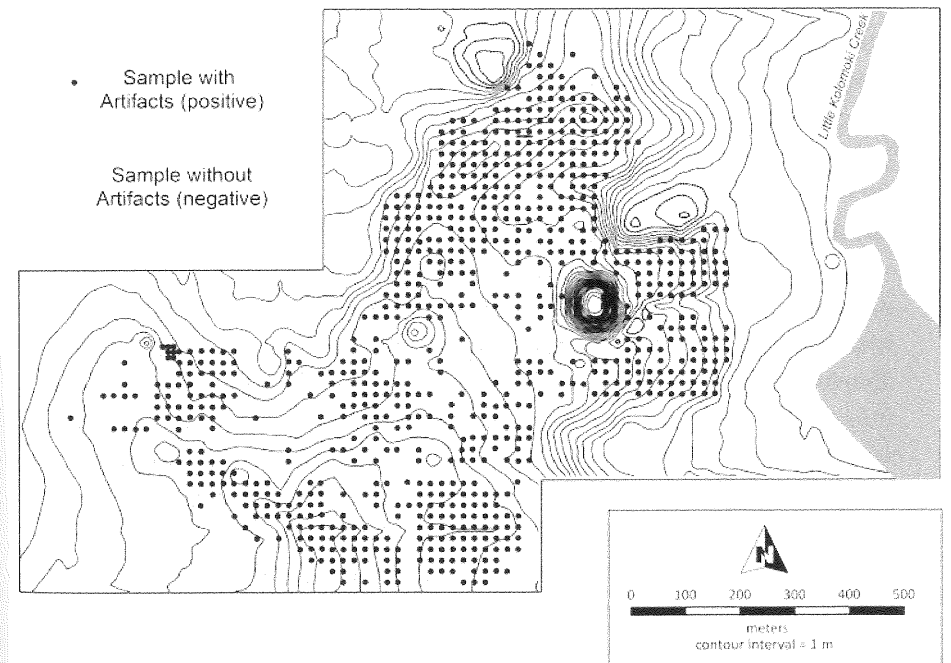


Figure 4.2. Pluckhahn’s systematic sitewide grid. Note that samples are generally spaced in 20 m intervals and are comprised of 30 cm diameter shovel tests ( $n=1,084$ ) and 4 m diameter “dog leash” surface collections ( $n=225$ ) (Pluckhahn 2003:91). Figure adapted from Pluckhahn (2003:Figure 4.1).

the northern arc of the outer village revealed numerous features and at least one semisubterranean house, indicating that this was an area of intensive, probably year-round habitation (Pluckhahn 2003:130–139, 148–165). Based on a relative ceramic chronology that assumed a gradual shift from Swift Creek to Weeden Island pottery, and supplemented by several radiocarbon dates, Pluckhahn (2003:183–219) described four 100-year phases of village occupation covering the interval from AD 350 to 750. The inner and outer rings were assumed to have formed early in the site's history, concomitant with the construction of the site's two burial mounds (Mounds D and E). Ceramic changes, dated to around AD 550, marked a shift from the formal, circular village plan to a more haphazard arrangement that coincided with a decline in mound construction.

An additional block excavation just south of Mound A was carried out by Pluckhahn between 2006 and 2008 to investigate an area of relatively late occupation at Kolomoki (see Pluckhahn 2010a, 2011, 2013, 2015). This excavation complicated Pluckhahn's (2003) previous assessment of the site's chronology. Specifically, radiocarbon dates suggested that the ceramic changes occurred later and at a more rapid pace than previously assumed; comparisons with other dated contexts suggested a somewhat sudden increase in the relative frequency and variety of Weeden Island pottery around AD 750. The Block D excavation also indicated that the occupation of Kolomoki persisted a century or so later than previously assumed (Pluckhahn 2011:179–209).

### New Insights on Kolomoki's Village

Pluckhahn's Block D excavations, coupled with new assessments of the regional chronology (see Smith 2009; Smith and Neiman 2007), made it apparent that the occupational history of Kolomoki's village was in need of refinement. Toward this end, Menz (2015) and West (2016) began a field program within the heretofore little-investigated southern arc of the outer village. In addition to retrieving ten new AMS dates (six from the southern arc of the outer village), the materials generated by our program also served to illuminate contrasts between sections of Kolomoki's residential areas. Comparisons of ceramic densities, pit and post feature frequency and volume, and macrobotanical assemblages corroborated Pluckhahn's (2003:120, 122) original assessment of the southern arc as an area of more seasonal occupation relative to its northern counterpart (West 2016). Patterned differences in distributions of lithic raw materials and reduction strategies between the northern and southern arcs of the outer village have also been identified (Menz 2015), and aspects of mound symbolism represent opposition between north and south that mirrors the village arcs (Pluckhahn 2003).

These and other disparities suggest Kolomoki's outer village was composed of a socially heterogeneous community, one that recent research also indicates was a prominent node in regional networks of exchange (Wallis, Cordell, et al. 2016; Wallis, Pluckhahn, and Glascock 2016).

Our new AMS dates were combined with nine trapped charge assays recently obtained by Pluckhahn and Neill Wallis, and 12 radiometric determinations generated from previous projects at the site (see Pluckhahn 2003:Table 2.3, 2011:Table 7-1) to construct a Bayesian model of occupation for Kolomoki's village. Here we provide only a cursory description of the new village chronology; more thorough descriptions of the details of our model can be found elsewhere (see Pluckhahn et al. 2018 or West 2016:139–148 for a previous version).

Based on our model, we now think that the earliest occupation at Kolomoki began in the second or third century AD. The nature of this occupation, however, is at present poorly understood. Dates adhering to this early and lengthy interval represent five assays scattered across the site, with locations within the vicinity of Mound D being most strongly represented (Figure 4.3). During Phase I, Kolomoki may have been used mainly for ceremonial purposes, perhaps with scattered habitations, but lacking a formal village plan. Alternatively, the inner village may have been established during this phase, though is perhaps simply underrepresented in our batch of dates.

Phase II, beginning sometime around the sixth or seventh century AD, provides stronger evidence for the initiation of a formal residential plan within the inner village. Pluckhahn's (2003:108, 120) previous investigations appeared to indicate less permanent settlement of this inner ring, though the richness of the midden below Mound D (see Sears 1953, 1956:9) suggests the possibility that the remainder of this habitation area may have been severely eroded from intensive agriculture in the nineteenth century. It is also possible that the material remains here were remodeled by later activities, including the use of midden for mound fill (Caldwell 1978:96) or to construct portions of the site's enclosures. Notably, Phase II also contains dates from two isolated contexts in the northern and southern arcs of the outer village. In any case, based on these dates and the pottery recovered from shovel tests, we now suspect that Kolomoki's village during Phase II conformed to a ring, probably open toward the east, that minimally fronted the site's central plaza. Radiocarbon dates suggest that the construction of Mound E might have been coincident with this early village (Crane 1956; Pluckhahn 2003:Table 2.3).

This inner village measured around 300 m wide by at least 400 m long, and defined a plaza about 150 m wide and 250 m long. It was anchored at its western end by a burial mound (Mound D), and may have been defined at the other end by a



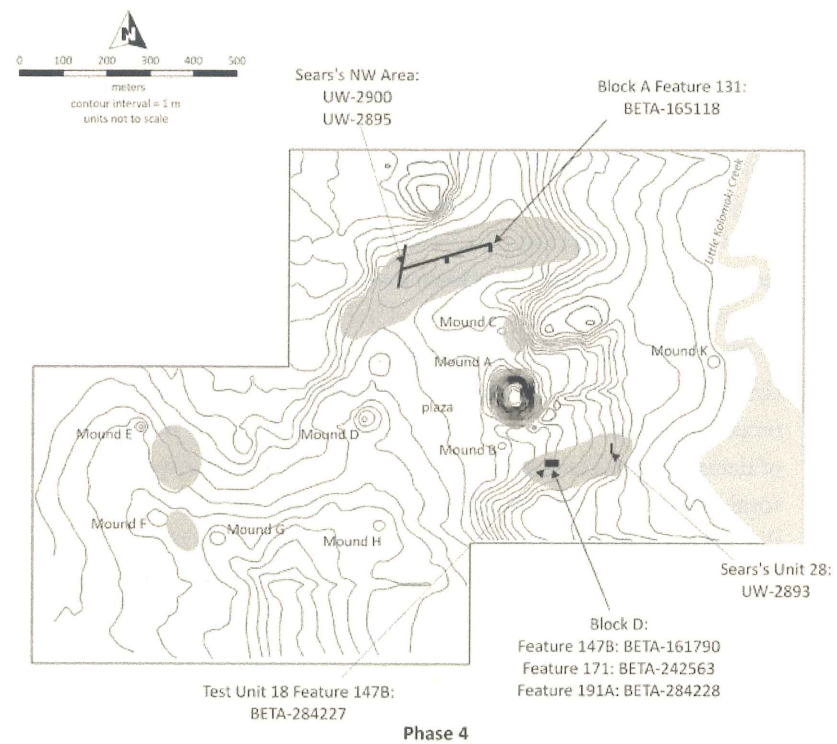
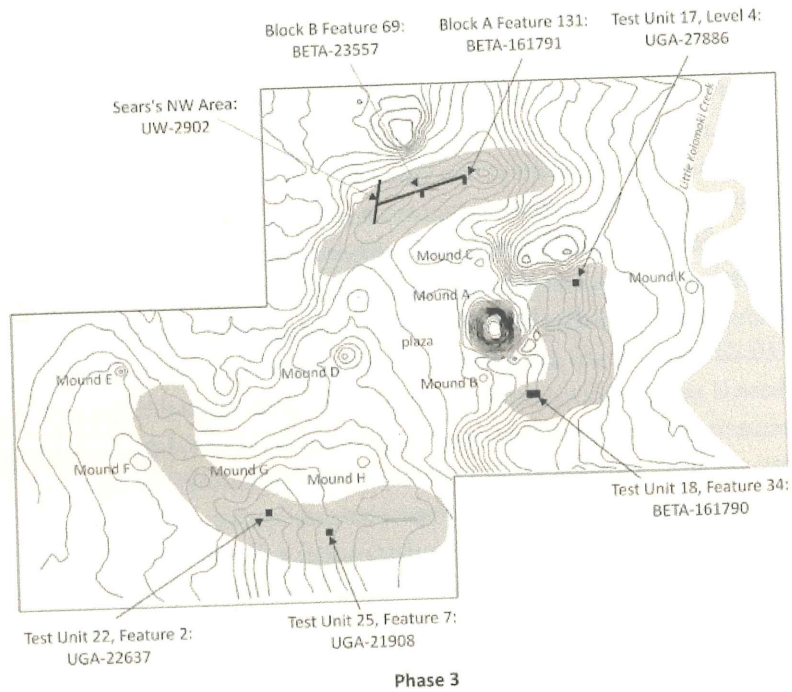
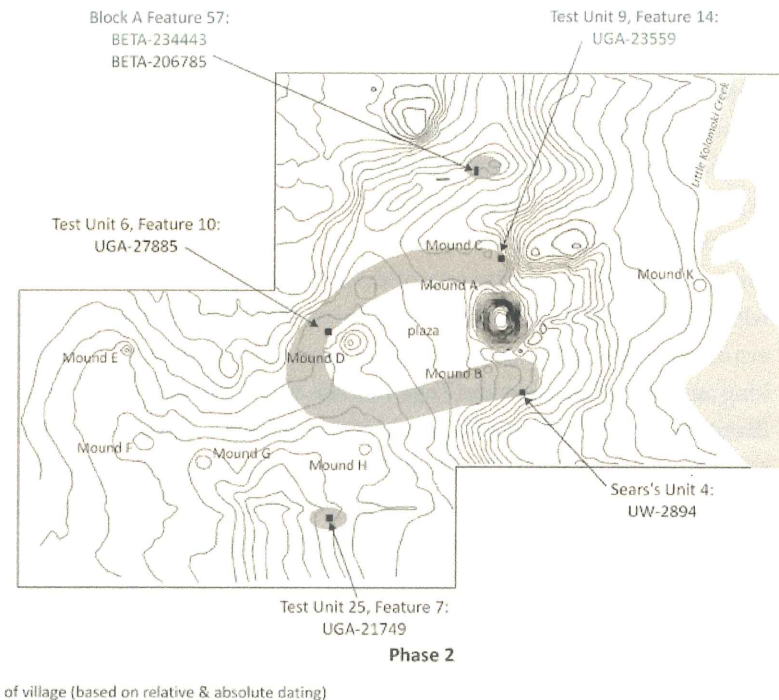
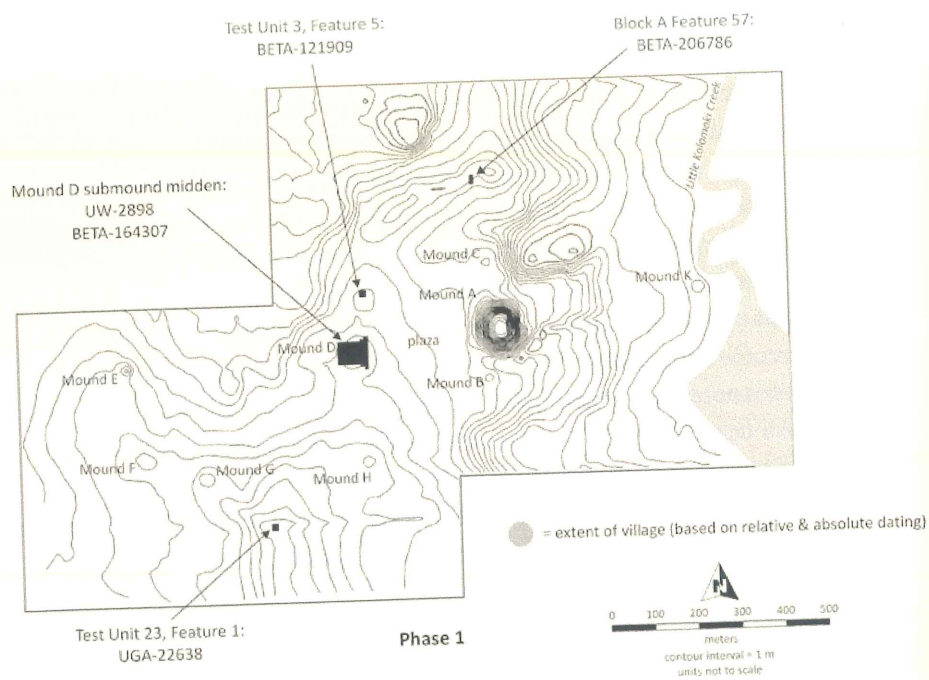


Figure 4.3. The approximate extent of Kolomoki's village areas corresponding to our revised chronology.



platform mound (Mound A). In form, this village was similar to the ring middens found throughout the region. In size, however, it was already at least three times larger than the average Swift Creek villages of its time (see Russo et al. 2011:27; Stephenson et al. 2002:342; Willey 1949:368).

Around the turn of the eighth century AD, corresponding with our Phase III, the village plan conformed to a much larger discontinuous ring, now largely open toward the west. During this interval, the inner village appears to have fallen into disuse as the two opposing arcs of the outer village were fully established along with an intermediate area of occupation east of Mound A. The northern and southern arcs are each at least 500 m long by 50 m wide. The eastern arc is roughly 300 m long and around 100 m wide. Together, the arcs define an area of around 850 m in diameter. Weeden Island villages are generally larger than their Swift Creek counterparts; examples in north and northwest Florida typically range from around 100 to 250 m in extent (Milanich et al. 1997; Russo et al. 2011). The McKeithen site in north Florida, perhaps the best-documented Weeden Island village, is around 450 m in diameter (Milanich et al. 1997). Kolomoki's outer village was thus more than three times the size of a typical Weeden Island village, and roughly twice the size of its closest peer.

Mounds A and D may have been constructed or enlarged in association with this period of village expansion. The most recent TL date for ceramics associated with the pottery cache in Mound D provides a terminus post quem (TPQ) of AD 570 to 870 (Pluckhahn et al. 2018). A recent radiocarbon date on charcoal recovered by Edward Palmer from the upper levels of Mound A provides a TPQ of cal AD 680 to 770. Consistent with the hypertrophic nature of the village during this phase, Mound D was arguably the largest and most elaborate Weeden Island burial mound in the region (Sears 1953, 1956), while Mound A represented the largest Woodland-period platform mound in eastern North America (Wood and Pluckhahn 2017).

The final interval, Phase IV, represents another puzzling period in our revised chronology. During the eighth or ninth centuries AD, sections of the outer village remained occupied, though seemingly to a substantially less extent. The majority of dates assigned to this interval were retrieved primarily from excavations just southeast of Mound A, though a few dates from this phase are also associated with the northern arc of the outer village.

### Kolomoki as a Hypertrophic Village

A certain amount of "empty" space is inherent to all Swift Creek and Weeden Island ring middens, in that these villages are, by definition, centered on plazas. But

the habitation areas that define Kolomoki's outer village encompass not only an oversized plaza but also the relatively substantial open areas between the inner and outer villages. In terms of topography and proximity to resources—much of the southern arc of the outer village is located well removed from the nearest water source—there seem to be no compelling reasons that the arcs of the outer village needed to be separated by such vast distances. We believe Kolomoki's village suggests a degree of exaggeration of size consistent with the term "hypertrophic." In keeping with the use of this expression in reference to oversized artifacts, we suggest that the hypertrophic village at Kolomoki did not function in the same sense as villages of typical size.

Birch (2013:6, following Kolb and Snead 1997) has observed that political economic perspectives tend to ascribe three basic functions to communities: "social reproduction, subsistence production, and self-identification or group association." We doubt that the hypertrophic village at Kolomoki operated effectively with regard to social reproduction or subsistence production. At an average walking pace of around 1.4 m (4.5 ft)/second (Carey 2005), crossing between the northern and southern arcs of the outer village would have required a 10-minute walk. This would seem to have been an impediment to face-to-face communication or cooperation in daily activities, especially as compared to the more ubiquitous compact Middle Woodland villages in the region. Further, the distance between these arcs is about four times the normal intelligible outdoor range of the human voice (at around 180 m) (Guinness World Records 2016). Visual communication would have also been a challenge; human-scale objects are reportedly resolvable from a distance of just under 3 km (Wolchover 2012), so while it would have been possible for villagers on the opposing arcs to see each other, it likely would have been difficult to identify who they were or what they were doing. These constraints on everyday interaction suggest to us that the hypertrophic village plan was not intended to promote social reproduction or cooperative subsistence production at the village level. Indeed, we wonder if the size of the village was intended to limit interaction, perhaps primarily to special occasions.

Still, the formal opposition of the northern and southern arcs of the outer village across the central plaza and east–west axis of mounds is a powerful signal that the hypertrophic village at Kolomoki was intended to promote self-identification and group association. Sassaman and Randall (2007:208) argue that hypertrophic bannerstones "were designed to make an emphatic statement about cultural identity" in the centuries leading up to the Classic Stallings ethnogenesis. The relative abundance of elaborated bannerstone forms indicates that the Stallings Island site was "a locus of traditionalism, not in the sense of

conservative, unchanging cultural practice, but rather in the elaboration of tradition to emphatically assert difference with an emergent ‘other.’” Similarly, Johnson and Brookes (1989) observe that oversized Benton points appear to have been coincident with a network of exchange in Fort Payne Chert during the Late Archaic period in the middle Tennessee and upper Tombigbee drainages. They relate the occurrence of this network to an increase in sedentism and social boundedness.

It is not clear why the Phase III residents of Kolomoki’s hypertrophic village felt it necessary to make such a bold declaration of identity, but recent work suggests that they were not alone, as a number of circular villages in the surrounding region appear to have undergone significant alterations or relocations during the mid-to-late seventh century AD. On the west coast of the Florida peninsula, Wallis and colleagues (Wallis and McFadden 2013, 2014, 2016; Wallis et al. 2015) have documented a change in the orientation of the circular village at the Garden Patch site. As demonstrated by Russo and colleagues (2009, 2011, 2014) in the Florida panhandle, smaller Swift Creek ring middens were abandoned as larger new ones were established nearby.

The scale of both the residential plan and the central plaza suggests that Kolomoki held a role as a sort of regional hub, a notion supported by the labor that would have been required to complete Mounds A and D (Pluckhahn 2003:Table 7.3; Sears 1956:93). In this light, and with the apparent power of hypertrophic artifacts to serve as markers of social identity, it is worth noting the location of Kolomoki near the northern and southern bounds of the Weeden Island and Swift Creek pottery traditions, respectively (see Figure 4.1). Consistent with recent models of community formation at later mound centers such as Cahokia, where the coming together of diverse ethnicities is emphasized (e.g., Alt 2002, 2006; Emerson and Hargrave 2000; Pauketat 2003, 2007), perhaps Kolomoki’s hypertrophic village provided a mechanism that allowed people of different regions to participate in the creation of a pan-regional identity, while also acknowledging and preserving their disparities. Physical separation between the more permanent residents in the northern arc of the outer village and those that resided more seasonally toward the south may have been an active strategy for lessening tensions among different factions, even as the formality of the layout sent a message of social solidarity.

As a corollary to the notion of group identity, we suggest that Kolomoki’s hypertrophic village may have had agentive qualities both real and imagined. Regarding the former, we think it likely that the residents of Kolomoki’s village were attributed a certain amount of regional prestige, simply from their association with the oversized settlement. Superlatives such as “largest” and “most elab-

orate” were presumably as attractive in the past as they are today. Kolomoki’s size and elaboration may have afforded it a standing comparable to the “old, beloved white towns” of the historic Creek, which were ascribed special status because of their age (see Hudson 1976:238–239). While discussing regional dynamics, Milanich and colleagues (1997:43) allude to a similar idea: “Kolomoki’s reputation among Weeden Island peoples must have dwarfed those of McKeithen and Aspalaga” (two of the larger Weeden Island sites in the region). Perhaps as Kolomoki’s size increased, so too would have the draw of people, similar to our modern fascination with big cities, because they are *big cities*.

With regards to its symbolic agency, we suggest that aspects of Kolomoki’s site plan represent common cosmological themes writ large on the landscape. Specifically, the village plan mirrors the concentric circles common to Swift Creek pottery, interpreted by Snow (1998) as representative of the sun circle. As Snow (1998:82–52) notes, the sun symbol was frequently substituted as an eye in Swift Creek depictions of human and animals faces, and is reminiscent of the Choctaw belief “that the Sun watched them with its great blazing eye, and so long as the eye was on them they were all right, but if the eye was not on them they were doomed” (Hudson 1976:126). The central mound axis also calls to mind the later (Mississippian and historic era) cosmological progression from above the world (the Mound A platform on the east) to this world (the plaza in the center) to the underworld (the Mound D burial facility on the west) (see also West and Menz 2015). Whether or not associations such as these originated at Kolomoki or the smaller ring middens in the surrounding region is unclear based on current dating. However, these themes were certainly more fully elaborated at Kolomoki; the symbolic power of the hypertrophic village was probably similarly outsized.

### Potential Examples of Other Hypertrophic Villages

We do not present the hypertrophic village as a functional or classificatory type to be generalized, but as a concept to be explored. As is apparent in several of the chapters in this volume, it seems clear that villages elsewhere in time and space might have been deliberately exaggerated in size in a similar manner to Kolomoki, and especially in cases where social identities and boundaries were likewise in flux. Additional potential instances of hypertrophic villages can be found, for example, in the North American midcontinent, where Krause (2001:198) has described the “less than cohesive placement of lodges and their low average density per palisade-enclosed space” for Initial Coalescent settlements of the Plains Village tradition. Krause further summarizes differing interpretations for the peculiar village and



palisade plan: some suggest it was an ad hoc response to warfare by dispersed households, while others view it as “a conscious attempt to retain the basic elements of Central Plains community in the face of an unfamiliar and potentially hostile social environment” (2001:198).

The later, ethnographically documented settlements of the Great Plains might also provide an appropriate context for the concept of the hypertrophic village. For the Cheyenne, Hoebel (1960:6) described summer-solstice aggregations of “eight hundred to a thousand tipis . . . raised in a great open circle, in the form of the new moon.” The Arrow Renewal ceremony associated with these aggregations was described by Hoebel (1960:11) as “the great symbolic integrator of the tribe, ritually demonstrating that the tribe . . . is more than the sum of its parts.” Hoebel provides no images of these aggregations, but photographs from other sources suggest considerable spacing between tipis and much unoccupied space (e.g., Lenny and Sawyers 2016).

From much farther afield, the Trypillia “Mega-sites” of Ukraine—dating to the interval from around 4000 to 3200 BC (Chapman et al. 2014)—are another possible example. These settlements of up to several kilometers in length are generally much larger than Kolomoki, and demonstrate greater density of habitations, but also share certain broad structural similarities, including their concentric “circuits” of habitations separated by open spaces and surrounding a central, vast open space, similar to Kolomoki’s plaza areas.

Finally, another parallel may be drawn with the Iahita village near the Sepik River of northeastern New Guinea, which Tuzin (2001) describes as a settlement of much greater size than those typical of the region. Iahita is notable for its composition of numerous spatially separated and semiautonomous “wards” integrated through ritual practice and common village identity (Tuzin 2001:72–75). Variable concentrations of different artifact types throughout the proposed village arc at Kolomoki may represent different clusters of households within the village (Menz 2015:84), similar to the wards identified by Tuzin at Iahita.

Willey (1953:6) wondered if a past inhabitant of the Virú Valley would have considered the residents of households several hundred meters distant from their own as members of the same village. We share his conclusion that this hypothetical villager could have conceived the answer as both yes and no. At one level, the size of the hypertrophic village at Kolomoki must have constrained the sort of daily interactions critical to the social reproduction of the community. But on another level, the formal structure of the hypertrophic village was a statement of shared identity, and the size and cosmological associations communicated power to both the residents of this village and the dozens of smaller but similarly structured villages throughout the region.

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## 5

### When Villages Do Not Form

A Case Study from the Piedmont Village Tradition–Mississippian Borderlands, AD 1200–1600

ERIC E. JONES

This chapter explores factors that influenced the absence of village formation among Piedmont Village Tradition (PVT) households in the upper Yadkin River valley. This occurred in an area and at a time when other nearby PVT groups were coalescing and hierarchically organized societies with Mississippian characteristics were emerging in and migrating into the area. In these cases, the resultant settlement form was the village, as defined by Thompson and Birch (this volume) as a permanent, multifamily residential cluster with emphasis on interhousehold interaction. For the PVT communities in the Eno, Haw, and Dan River valleys, this took the form of a ring of 6–12 houses surrounding a central cleared space and surrounded by a palisade (Davis and Ward 1991; Dickens et al. 1987; Simpkins 1985; Ward and Davis 1993). This new settlement form suggests a change in social organization toward household interdependence and cooperation. For Mississippians in the lower Yadkin/Pee Dee River valley and the upper and lower Catawba River valleys, settlements contained clusters of houses sometimes around a single mound (Boudreaux 2007; Moore 2002; Oliver 1992). The upper Yadkin River valley, located between these areas of village-dwellers, continued a trend of dispersed household settlements with little evidence of cooperative structures or interhousehold interdependence (Jones et al. 2012; Woodall 1984, 1990, 1999, 2009). This research attempts to explain this distinct pattern in the context of the broader village formation occurring.

Previous research has offered explanations for the distribution of PVT (Jones and Ellis 2016) and Mississippian settlements (Jones 2015, 2017a) and for specific settlement changes in the upper Yadkin River valley during AD 800–1600 (Jones 2017b). My goal here is to combine existing regional and subregional