ARCHITECTURAL SYMBOLISM AND CHEROKEE TOWNHOUSES

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Public structures known as townhouses were hubs of public life within Cherokee communities in the southern Appalachians before and after European contact. Townhouses themselves were architectural manifestations of Cherokee towns. The architectural symbolism of townhouses was related to the symbolism of late precontact Mississippian platform mounds, mythical connections between earthen mounds and Cherokee townhouses, and color symbolism that was widespread in the Southeast during the eighteenth century. These points are evident from documentary sources, oral tradition, and the sequence of protohistoric Cherokee townhouses at the Coweeta Creek site in southwestern North Carolina.

Architecture communicates. Structures and outdoor spaces create settings for the practice of public and domestic life, but the built environment also reflects status distinctions, social structure, social values, and cosmology (Barrett 1994; Bourdieu 1977; Cunningham 1973; Fisher 2009; Hodder 1994; Horton 1994; Kuper 1993; Lane 1994; Parker Pearson and Richards 1994a, 1994b; Richards 1990). Architectural spaces themselves shape cultural activity, senses of community, and senses of place, and the built environment has both communicative and mnemonic dimensions (Beck 2007; Creel and Anyon 2003; Crown and Wills 2003; Knight 1998; Lawrence and Low 1990; Lekson 1996; Lewis and Stout 1998; Lewis, Stout, and Wesson 1998; Shafer 1995; Thompson 2009; Van Dyke 1999a, 1999b, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009; Wesson 1998). Household dwellings and outbuildings mark the residences and activity areas of particular groups within a community, they reflect environmental conditions and considerations, and they often convey the status and other characteristics of households themselves. Amos Rapoport (1969) has explored these and other dimensions of dwellings in his influential comparative study of vernacular architecture. Mircea Eliade (1957) has identified evidence for cosmological symbolism in architecture in several cultural traditions in his ethnological study of the nature of religion.[1] Public structures and outdoor spaces such as plazas mark the presence of communities within regional landscapes, and they create settings for the public events and activities through which community ties are created and renewed. The meanings of particular architectural forms, and of specific structures, are not always easy to decipher, especially when dealing with archaeological evidence (Bailey 1990), but ethnohistoric sources and oral tradition can, in some cases, guide archaeological interpretations. Such is the case with Cherokee settlements in the southern Appalachians, for which we can draw upon archaeological and ethnohistoric sources, and oral tradition (Mooney 1900), in an effort to identify symbolic aspects of architecture, including those related to the color symbolism of red, black, and white.[2]

During the eighteenth century, public structures known as townhouses, and the plazas beside them, were focal points for Cherokee towns (Baden 1983; Goodwin 1977; Rodning 2001a, 2002a, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Russ and Chapman 1983; Schroedl 1978, 1986, 2000, 2001, 2009; Smith 1979; Sullivan 1987, 1995, 2001, 2006; Sullivan and Rodning 2001). Only settlements with townhouses were known as towns (Figure 1). Townhouses and plazas were venues for dances, deliberations by town councils, ritual preparations for warfare, and events related to trade and diplomacy. At the Coweeta Creek site (31MA34) in southwestern North Carolina, at least six successive stages of a townhouse span the period from the 1600s through the very early 1700s (Figure 2). In this paper, I review characteristics of Mississippian platform mounds that have parallels in the series of townhouses at Coweeta Creek, and I consider the significance of color symbolism to Cherokee townhouses in general and those at Coweeta Creek in particular.

The sequence of townhouses at Coweeta Creek spans a period of considerable geopolitical instability and uncertainty for Cherokee towns and for other native societies in eastern North America. Native groups were greatly affected during this period by the slave trade and the new forms of warfare sparked by it, by conflicts and shifting alliances related to the presence of European colonists, by demographic displacements and movements by some groups to new settlements and new regions, and perhaps by disease epidemics in some areas (Beck 2009; Bowne 2000, 2005, 2006, 2009; Ethridge 1984, 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Gallay 2002; Kelton 2002, 2007, 2009; Martin 1994; Meyers 2009; Milner et al. 2001; Smith 1987, 1989, 1994, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006; Worth 2009). They also pursued new opportunities they had for trade with European colonists (Corkran 1953, 1955, 1969; Davis 2002; Davis and Ward 1991; Gearing 1958, 1962; Hatley 1989, 1993; Merrell 1987, 1989a, 1989b, 2006; Rodning 2002b, 2002c; Schroedl 1986; Ward and Davis 2001; Waselkov 1989, 1992, 1993, 1994). Public architecture is one medium through
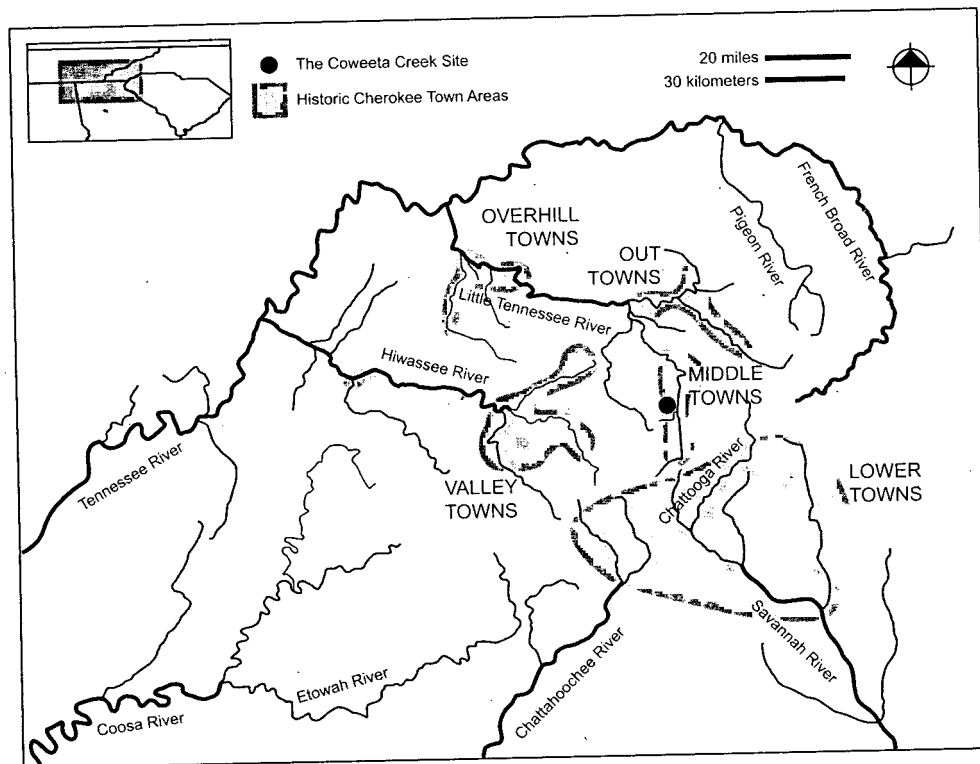
Figure 1. The location of the Coweeta Creek site and the historic Middle Cherokee settlements in southwestern North Carolina (after Rodning 2001a:78, 2001b:239, 2002b:156, 2004:3, 2008:3, 2009a:2, 2009b:628).

which the Cherokee community at Coweeta Creek responded to European contact, during the period after Spanish expeditions in the Southeast but before the development of the deerskin trade with English colonists in South Carolina. References to Mississippian mound-building practices would have helped the Coweeta Creek community anchor itself to a particular place within the rapidly changing landscape of colonial North America, and references to "red" and "white" symbolism in the Coweeta Creek townhouse probably were related to the involvement of this town in a balance between diplomacy and peace (associated with "white"), on the one hand, and warfare (associated with "red") on the other, during a period when all of these activities were critical to community survival.

Earthen Mounds and Public Structures

Mississippian platform mounds in the Southeast were typically quadrilateral in shape, with flat summits that were often—but not always—surfaces on which structures were built (Blitz and Livingood 2004; Kidder 1998; Knight 2006; Lindauer and Blitz 1997; Payne and Scarry 1998; Schnell, Knight, and Schnell 1981; Stout and Lewis 1998). Whatever the significance of structures and activities on the summits of these mounds, the acts of building mounds and periodically adding mound stages would have involved many people, and mound-building events would have created and renewed the relationships connecting people to each other and to the mounds themselves. Additions of earthen mantles to Mississippian mounds were probably associated with succession from one generation of a community and its leadership to another (Hally 1993, 1996, 1999), as well as with themes of world renewal, purification, and, more generally, the life history of the groups who built mounds and recognized them as significant landmarks and sacred points within the Mississippian cultural landscape (Knight 1986, 1998, 2006; Krause 1996; Miller 2001; Rudolph 1984; Schambach 1996). As evident in Native American words for mounds—such as a Muskogee term translated as "earth sitting" and a Yuchi term translated as "land sitting"—mounds were earth symbols, and the quadrilateral shape of mounds referred symbolically to the four corners of the world (Knight 1989:279–280). Some mounds were platforms for elite residences, others for ceremonial structures and ritual spaces—or both—but, importantly, and independent of the variety of functions served by mound summits, the mounds themselves were symbols, or icons (Knight 1986:678–680).

In the greater southern Appalachians, platform mounds replaced earthlodges as major forms of public architecture during late prehistory. As characterized by James Rudolph (1984) in his comparative study of sites
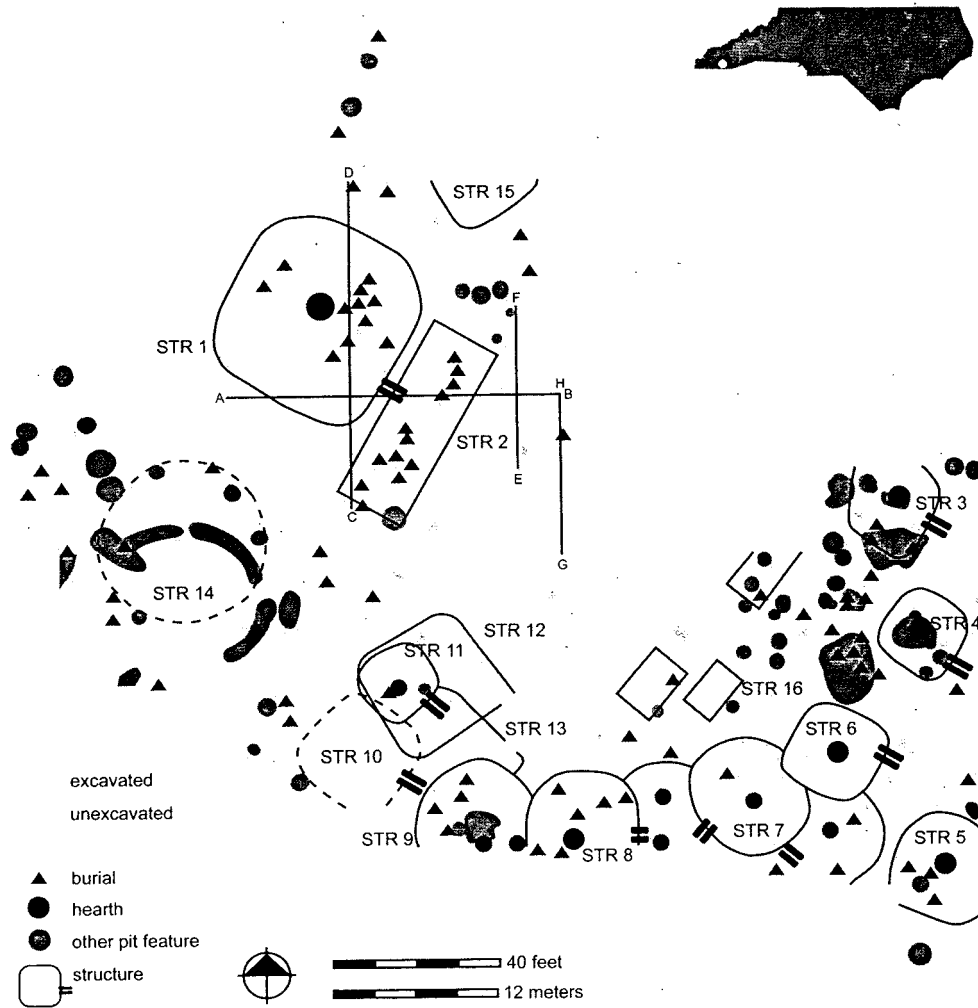
Figure 2. Schematic map of public and domestic architecture at the Coweeta Creek site (after Rodning 2001a:79, 2002a:12, 2004:129, 2007:470, 2009b:629; Rodning and VanDerwarker 2002:5; Sullivan and Rodning 2001:117; © Society for American Archaeology, reprinted by permission from *American Antiquity* 74[4]). Lines marked A–B and C–D represent the stratigraphic profiles shown in Figure 5. Lines marked E–F and G–H represent the stratigraphic profiles shown in Figure 6.

from across the greater southern Appalachians, earth-lodges were public structures, and they were "above-ground building[s] that had either an earth covered roof or an earth embankment buttressing the exterior walls" (Rudolph 1984:33). Rudolph (1984:34) notes that late prehistoric earthlodges were generally analogous to earth-embanked public structures at late prehistoric and protohistoric sites. Platform mounds widely replaced earthlodges as prevalent forms of public architecture in the southern Appalachians between the 1200s and 1400s. In some cases, platform mounds literally covered the remnants of earthlodges, as has been demonstrated at sites such as Garden Creek, Peachtree, Tugalo, and possibly Chauga, in and very near areas where Cherokee towns and townhouses were located during the 1600s and 1700s (Anderson 1994; Dickens 1976; Keel 1976; Kelly and Neitzel 1961; Setzler and Jennings 1941; Williams and Branch 1978).

Like late prehistoric platform mounds in the Missis-sippian Southeast, Cherokee townhouses were archi-tectural anchors around which town plazas and domestic areas were built (Rodning 2002a, 2009b; Schroedl 2000, 2001, 2009). At many Mississippian town sites, domestic structures were placed in rela-tively compact arrangements around mounds and plazas themselves (Boudreaux 2008; Clay 2006; Green and Munson 1978; Lewis, Stout, and Wesson 1998; D. Morse 1990; P. Morse 1990; Price 1978; Price and Price 1990; Schroedl 1998; Stout and Lewis 1998; Wilson 2008). In some areas, on the other hand—including Caddoan areas at the western edge of the Southeast (Brown, Bell, and Wyckoff 1978; Rogers 1995); the Oconee River Valley in Georgia (Hatch 1995; Williams 1994; Williams and Shapiro 1996); and perhaps the lower Ohio Valley (Muller 1978, 1998)—houses and farmsteads were scattered relatively widely in dis-persed settlement patterns, even though people from

these dispersed settlements maintained mounds and public structures as community centers (Perttula 2009; Pertulla and Rogers 2007). In both nucleated and dispersed settlement patterns, platform mounds were focal points and anchors for local communities and regional polities who were associated with them, and who periodically added mantles to those mounds. During the eighteenth century, Cherokee townhouses similarly served as focal points and anchors for Cherokee towns, even as houses and households spread out at greater and greater distances from these community centers (Hill 1997; Pillsbury 1983; Wilms 1974), as also happened with Creek towns in Alabama and Georgia (Ethridge 2003; Knight 1985; Wesson 2008), where the distances between houses and between houses and public structures increased dramatically from the 1600s through the late 1700s.

Platform mounds—and townhouses dating to the protohistoric and historic periods—are not the only forms of architecture in the Southeast with symbolic and even cosmological meanings. Kay and Sabo (2006) identify evidence for a relatively widespread practice of charnel house mortuary ceremonialism in the Arkansas River Valley and the western Ozarks, with periodic episodes of burning and rebuilding charnel houses as significant components of the life cycles of these structures, and Pertulla (2009; Sabo 1998; Story 1998) identifies regional variations of these "extended entranceway" structures from the western Ozarks to eastern Texas. The cardinal alignments of these entryways, the practice of sealing entryways before firing them, and the columns of smoke that would rise into the sky when these charnel houses were burned down are all thought to have added to the death imagery and cosmological symbolism of these mortuary structures. Burning these structures is analogous to cyclical practices of building, burning, burying, and rebuilding ceremonial structures, associated with late prehistoric mounds in the Caddoan area (Schambach 1996) and in the Tennessee River Valley in Alabama (Krause 1996). Structures both on and off mounds, then, are clearly associated with cosmological symbolism.[3] Many structures, meanwhile, were closely associated with mounds, both in the form of placement on mounds and in similarities between mound sequences and cycles of structure building and rebuilding.

Like quadrilateral platform mounds across much of the Southeast, late prehistoric and historic townhouses in the southern Appalachians were square with rounded corners. Such structures are evident at the late prehistoric Ledford Island and Toqua sites in eastern Tennessee, the mid- to late-sixteenth-century King site, and at the Lower Cherokee town of Chattooga (Hally 2008; Polhemus 1987; Schroedl 2000, 2001, 2009; Sullivan 1987). The square theme is replicated within both public and domestic structures

at South Appalachian Mississippian sites in the form of roof-support posts arranged around central hearths in arrangements that form squares around those hearths. Many of these structures and contemporaneous domestic structures would have had earthen embankments (Hally 2002). Some earth would have been incorporated in the roofs of these structures, even if only in those sections directly above hearths, inside roof-support posts.

Cherokee townhouses therefore resemble platform mounds, in some respects, and, furthermore, oral tradition relates townhouses to earthen mounds. Several myths and legends refer to townhouses built on mounds. More generally, there are connections drawn between townhouses, earthen mounds, and mountains, thereby relating symbolic points in the cultural landscape (mounds and townhouses) to permanently visible landmarks (mountains) in the natural landscape.

In the legend of "The Removed Townhouses," a townhouse is picked up by spirits, a section of it is dropped and then becomes an earthen mound, and another section of it becomes a mountain peak and a prominent natural landmark. From this perspective, mounds, mountains, and townhouses are landmarks that in part symbolize events that took place in the mythical past. Mooney (1900:335–336) has recorded this legend as follows:

Long ago, long before the Cherokee were driven from their homes in 1838, the people on the Valley river and Hiwassee heard voices of invisible spirits in the air calling and warning them of wars and misfortunes which the future held in store, and inviting them to come and live with the Nûñnĕ'hĭ, the Immortals, in their homes under the mountains and under the waters. For days the voices hung in the air, and the people listened until they heard the spirits say, "If you would live with us, gather everyone in your townhouses and fast there for seven days, and no one must raise a shout or a warwhoop in all that time. Do this and we shall come and you will see us and we shall take you to live with us." ... The people were afraid of the evils that were to come, and they knew that the Immortals of the mountains and the waters were happy forever, so they counciled in their townhouses and decided to go with them. Those of Anisgayâ'yĭ town came all together into their townhouse and prayed and fasted for six days. On the seventh day there was a sound from the distant mountains, and it came nearer and grew louder until a roar of thunder was all about the townhouse and they felt the ground shake under them. Now they were frightened, and despite the warning some of them screamed out. The Nûñnĕ'hĭ, who had already lifted up the townhouse with its mound to carry it away, were startled by the cry and let a part of it fall to the earth, where now we see the mound of Sĕt'sĭ. They steadied themselves again and bore the rest of the townhouse, with all the people in it, to the top of Tsuda'ye'lûñ'yĭ (Lone peak), near the head of Cheowa, where we can still see it, changed long ago to solid rock, but the people are invisible and immortal.

As described in the legend of "The Mounds and the Constant Fire," townhouses are built on earthen mounds. First a circle of stones is placed in the ground, then the burials of recently deceased principal men

within a community are placed in the ground, then a mound is built up by women placing basketloads of earth on the ground, and atop this mound is built a townhouse. Mooney (1900:395–396) has recorded this legend as follows:

> Some say that the mounds were built by another people. Others say they were built by the ancestors of the old Ani'-Kĭtu'hwagĭ for townhouse foundations, so that the townhouses would be safe when freshets came. The townhouse was always built on the level bottom lands by the river in order that the people might have smooth ground for their dances and ballplays and might be able to go down to water during the dance.... When they were ready to build the mound they began by laying a circle of stones on the surface of the ground. Next they made a fire in the center of the circle and put near it the body of some prominent chief or priest who had lately died—some say seven chief men from the different clans—together with an Ulûñsû'tĭ stone, an uktena scale or horn, a feather from the right wing of an eagle or great tlă'nuwă, which lived in those days, and beads of seven colors, red, white, black, blue, purple, yellow, and gray-blue.... The mound was then built up with earth, which the women brought in baskets, and as they piled it above the stones, the bodies of their great men, and the sacred things, they left an open place at the fire in the center and let down a hollow cedar trunk, with the bark on, which fitted around the fire and protected it from the earth. This cedar log was cut long enough to reach nearly to the surface inside the townhouse when everything was done. The earth was piled up around it, and the whole mound was finished off smoothly, and then the townhouse was built upon it.

Cherokee townhouses are known to have been or suspected to have been placed on the summits of earthen mounds in the southern Appalachians, and while the dates of early stages of many of these mounds are not known with certainty, they most likely predate European contact. There are written references in primary historic sources to eighteenth-century townhouses on the summits of the Whatoga and Cowee mounds in the upper Little Tennessee Valley (Waselkov and Braund 1995:76, 77, 84), and the townhouse at Nequassee is described as a large dome, probably in reference to the large earthen mound present at the corresponding archaeological site (Duncan and Riggs 2003:151–155; King and Evans 1977:284).[4]

Geophysical survey has revealed the archaeological footprint of a townhouse that once stood atop the Kituwha mound in the Tuckasegee Valley, and this footprint represents a larger-sized version of the townhouses at Coweeta Creek (Duncan and Riggs 2003; Riggs and Shumate 2003). Given the archaeological associations between mounds and Cherokee townhouses, and the associations between them in Cherokee oral tradition, I conclude that at least some of the symbolism of Mississippian mounds was embedded in Cherokee townhouses. If the symbolism of townhouses was related in part to the materiality and symbolism of platform mounds, I suggest that Cherokee townhouses may also manifest color symbolism and, specifically,

the symbolic meanings associated with red, white, and black in the Native American Southeast.

Archaeological Perspectives on Color Symbolism

Color is one visual dimension of architecture, and while it may be difficult to detect archaeologically, colors must have shaped perceptions of and experiences of architecture in the past. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence for red and white colors in Mississippian and Woodland mounds, structures, and even burials, perhaps (King 2003; Knight 1990; Pursell 2004; Welch 2006). With respect to the very different cultural setting of the Neolithic British Isles, Andrew Jones (1999) specifically and explicitly argues that color symbolism was manifested in megalithic tombs, and that differently colored boulders in the passage graves of Newgrange and Knowth in the River Boyne Valley, and on the Isle of Arran, manifested connections between these monuments and the specific source areas within the surrounding landscape. From these perspectives, and in these cases, colors were critical components of creating and experiencing the places in which monuments and structures were built.

Archaeologists have found evidence for color symbolism in both monumental architecture and material culture in a variety of cultural settings outside the Southeast, especially in the Old World (Allison 2002; Barber 1999; Baines 1985; Borić 2002; Chapman 2002; Cooney 2002; Darvill 2002; DeBoer 2005; Gage 1999; Gage et al. 1999; Jones and Bradley 1999; Jones and MacGregor 2002; Keates 2002; MacGregor 2002; Owoc 2002; Pursell 2004; Saunders 2002; Scarre 2002; Spence 1999; Taçon 1999, 2008; Tairov and Bushmakin 2002). Owoc (2002) argues that yellow clay mound caps in Bronze Age burial mounds in the British Isles were associated with solar alignments and solar symbolism. Darvill (2002) notes the widespread presence of white quartz cobbles and boulders in passage graves and causewayed enclosures in the Neolithic British Isles, perhaps symbolizing purity or ritual space in some cases, and more generally, connecting these Neolithic ritual spaces to places in surrounding landscapes that were sources of quartz and that had symbolic power as permanent places in the regional cultural landscape. MacGregor (2002) is less convinced that the stones in recumbent stone circles in Neolithic Britain were chosen primarily for specific colors, although there are some potentially meaningful patterns in the arrangements of gray or pink stones at sites in his study area in northern England and Scotland. MacGregor (2002) does confirm that recumbent stones and upright stones beside them were made of different raw material than the stones elsewhere in the circles around them, and he concludes that raw materials were chosen

for recumbent stone circles based on colors and textures that enabled people to create replicas of nearby mountainous landscapes.

These cases demonstrate relationships between color, monumental architecture, and concepts of place in Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe, and they demonstrate that colors in some forms of material culture are meaningful markers of status, identity, place, and liminality. Scarre (2002) notes the presence of red ochre in Mesolithic graves and even some Paleolithic graves in Europe, including graves in the Danube River Valley, where Boriç (2002) argues that differently colored pottery and flint were related to changing regional relationships among Early Neolithic societies in eastern Europe. Jones (1999) relates red and white stone placements in the architectural settings of Neolithic passage tombs on Arran to paths of movement within them, and Tilley (1996) likewise identifies red paint as visible markers of the liminal status of the dead buried in communal tombs of Neolithic Sweden. Cooney (2002) argues that color and other visual characteristics of Neolithic stone axes in Ireland connected people to the places where raw material was found, and he notes differences in the color and patterning of stone axes depending on whether they were wet or dry. Jones (2002) relates color symbolism in gold, jet, amber, and copper grave goods found in Early Bronze Age burial mounds in Britain to the increasing emphasis on individuality and social distinctions compared to the greater emphasis on groups and group identity during the Neolithic. Chapman (2002) makes comparable arguments with respect to grave goods from Bronze Age burials in eastern Europe, the colors of which seem to have been one means of materializing social distinctions among the living and the dead in the increasingly complex and hierarchical societies of Bronze Age Europe, as compared with the Neolithic. Keates (2002) considers color and metal in Copper Age Italy in the broader context of luminosity and iridescence, and he identifies copper daggers—whether depicted on carved stones or placed in the graves of adult males—as colorful markers of significant warrior statuses.

With these perspectives on colorful construction in mind, it is worth considering what colors and what color symbolism may have been present in the architecture of Cherokee public architecture in the southern Appalachians during the period just before and after European contact. As have societies in many world areas, native peoples of the Southeast have attached considerable symbolic significance to the colors red, white, and black (Cobb and Drake 2008; Cobb and Giles 2009:92; Dye 2009:160; Gearing 1962; Hudson 1976:234–237; Pursell 2004; Welch 2006). Red is traditionally associated with war, blood, and the sun. During the eighteenth century, and probably during late prehistory, warriors painted themselves red and black (Hudson 1976:244). White is traditionally associated with peace, light, purity, wholesomeness, and old age. The ancient Cherokee town of Chota was known as a "white town" or a "peace town" (Mooney 1900:207; Williams 1930:157). Among the Creeks, as noted by James Adair, peace towns were known as "old beloved, ancient, holy, or white towns" (Mooney 1900:208; Williams 1930:158). Within the historic Creek confederacy, there were white towns and red towns (Hudson 1976:235), and white clans and red clans (Hudson 1976:223). For both the Creeks and Cherokees, white towns were old towns, and the "mother" and "grandmother" towns from which newer towns were formed (Hudson 1976:238–239). Associations between white and "old" towns and between red and "new" towns may even have been related to color sequences of normal fires. Fires would begin by burning red and orange, and mature fires would create ashes and embers that were white. Diminishing fires eventually would leave behind charred and blackened pieces of wood. This cycle may also be related to the symbolic association between "black" and "death."

Hearths were present in Cherokee townhouses, of course, in the areas inside roof-support posts, and probably underneath the daubed smokehole in each roof. The fires kept inside these hearths would have burned red and orange, although, notably, there must have been white ashes and embers, and charred black wood, in those hearths as well. Alexander Longe lived in Cherokee settlements from 1711 to 1725, and he noted that the fires in Cherokee townhouse hearths burned constantly—which is to say they constantly generated "red" and "white" colors in the forms of flames, ashes, and embers (Corkran 1953:22–23). As Longe noted in the postscript to his journal about his experiences in Cherokee country, warriors would kindle "war fires" from the flames of the fires in townhouse hearths, which they would then take with them on the warpath—through this practice, the "red" flames from townhouse hearths were tangibly connected to the symbolically "red" practice of warfare (Corkran 1953:24–26). Many warriors probably were also hunters, and, therefore, there may have been symbolic associations between fire and hunting, as there were between fire and warfare. Longe records a custom in which a spiritual leader would periodically sacrifice a piece of deer meat to fire before any of it could be eaten by anybody in the community (Corkran 1953:23, 1955:36, 1969:12). Of course, fires in townhouse hearths also would have been related to the public life of a community, in that the fires kept in the hearths of domestic houses in a town would have been rekindled periodically with fire from the townhouse hearth (Hill 1997:12–13; Mooney 1900:502–503).

An association between fire and color symbolism is also evident in Cherokee oral traditions recorded

during the late nineteenth century. In the version of the myth, "The First Fire," recorded by Mooney (1900:240–242), several animals attempt to bring fire from a hollow sycamore tree on an island back to the place where the animals (and, eventually, people) dwell.[5] Raven went first, but his feathers were scorched black, which frightened him away. The Screech Owl followed, but while he was looking into the sycamore tree where the fire burned, his eyes were nearly burned out and they became red. The Hooting Owl and the Horned Owl followed the Screech Owl, but when they reached the island, the fire was burning so hot that the smoke nearly blinded them, and the smoke and ashes created white rings around their eyes. After the owls, the Black Racer and the Great Blacksnake tried to bring back fire, but they also were burned and scorched black. Finally, the water spider succeeded, by weaving a bowl and fastening it to her back, swimming to the island, and placing one small coal of fire into her bowl before swimming back across the water. Interestingly, water spiders—mythical and mortal—are black with red stripes. In one version of another cosmogonic myth, "How The World Was Made," recorded by Mooney (1900:239–240), another source of heat and light—the sun—scorches the shell of the crawdad red.[6]

Other sources of insight about color and the built environment of Cherokee towns are journals by eighteenth-century English colonists. Trader George Chicken and his troops put up both red and white flags on the Chota townhouse in 1715 as dual symbols of peacemaking (white) and the power (red) of the English colonial regime (Hatley 1993:12; Williams 1928:330). Chicken and others had quickly learned at least some of the salient color symbolism in Cherokee towns. Lieutenant Henry Timberlake visited the Overhill Cherokee settlements in eastern Tennessee in 1761 to make peace between the Overhill Cherokee and the Virginia colony (Gearing 1962:116–117; King 2007:18–19; Randolph 1973:149–150; Williams 1927:62–63). He saw white flags beside the Citico townhouse. He was told by the people of Citico that they placed red flags beside the townhouse when the town was at war, and they raised white flags as emblems of peace. Upon arriving at Citico, Timberlake was greeted by many townspeople, including many men who were painted red and black, and inside the Citico townhouse, Timberlake saw several men whose faces were painted white. The same color symbolism was evident many years later to Samuel Buttrick, an early-nineteenth-century Baptist missionary who noted that red poles were placed beside townhouses when Cherokee towns were at war and white poles were placed beside townhouses as emblems of peace (Gearing 1962:116–117; Schroedl 1986:223).

Red and white colors are also visible in architecture and earthworks in the Mississippian Southeast (Pursell 2004). Red ochre powder covered the floor of an Early Mississippian public structure at Etowah (King 2003:57), and there were red and orange clay caps in Etowah's Mound B (King 2001:13–23; Pursell 2004:88). There is evidence for color symbolism in Mississippian earthworks at the Shiloh mounds, located adjacent to the Tennessee River in southwestern Tennessee, including deposits of white, red, and yellow clay in mounds and deposits of white clay in some burials at the site (Welch 2006:152–153, 155, 162–170). Based on the presence of white clay mound stages and white clay deposits in burials, based on the general absence of grave goods related to warfare, and also given the apparent presence of only a single stage of a log stockade enclosing the mounds and plaza at Shiloh, Welch (2006:257–258) has made the interesting and compelling argument that Shiloh may have been a "white" town, or a "peace" town, at least during some period in its history. Of course, there are also examples of red mound surfaces at Shiloh, which, following Welch (2006:257–258), could represent stages in the life history of the Mississippian community at Shiloh when it was a "red" town, or a "war" town, or simply a younger community than it was when it became a white town. Red and white deposits are present in mounds at several other sites, in addition to Shiloh, as Corin Pursell (2004) has outlined in his detailed study of colors and color symbolism in mounds in the Mississippian Southeast.

Colors may have been associated with mounds in the Southeast dating to the Woodland period as well. Bright yellowish brown sandy clay covered the original earthen platform and burials in one of the Middle Woodland mounds at the Crooks site in Louisiana (Kidder 2002:76–77). In the Middle Woodland Ozier mound at the Pinson site in western Tennessee, coring has identified deposits of yellow sand (Mainfort 1986, 1987). There is some indication of red and white deposits in the Middle Woodland platform mound at the Walling site in northern Alabama (Knight 1990:31, 34–46, 171). At both Walling and at the Ingomar site in Mississippi (Rafferty 1987), differently colored mound deposits created a mosaic of colors rather than layers with different colors. Earthen mounds were and are significant elements of the built environment of the Native American Southeast, and the idea of colorful mounds goes deep into the past.

Red and white colors are also visible in the material culture of the Mississippian Southeast, in the form of red-and-white painted pottery. Such ceramics have been found at sites in the central Mississippi Valley (Morse and Morse 1983:216–221, 1990:154; Rolingson and Mainfort 2002), in the middle Tennessee Valley (Steponaitis and Knight 2004:174), and from Moundville and Etowah (King 2003; Steponaitis 1983:336–338). Cobb and Drake (2008) specifically relate red-and-

white painted head pots from the late prehistoric central Mississippi Valley to warrior ideology and to the prevalence of warfare in that province from the 1300s through the 1500s. Red pottery is found at Late Woodland period, Weeden Island culture sites in northern Florida and southern Georgia (Milanich et al. 1984; Pluckhahn 2003). Given these early manifestations of red and white in mounds, structures, and material culture, the structural dualism between red and white in many native societies of the Southeast during the eighteenth century—as outlined by Gearing (1962), Hudson (1976), Dye (2009), Pursell (2004), and others—has deep roots, and those roots may run even deeper than the Woodland period.

My main points here are simply that colors—particularly, red and white—had and have symbolic meaning to Native American societies of eastern North America, and the significance of these colors can potentially be traced back into the ancient past. From this perspective, it is not unreasonable to presume that red and white would have been incorporated—in literal or figurative senses—within the built environment of Cherokee towns dating just before and after European contact, when warfare and diplomacy were critical to community survival. Of course, many clay deposits in the Southeast are naturally red, white, yellow, or combinations of these colors. On the other hand, given the symbolism associated with "red" and "white" in the Native American Southeast after European contact (Hudson 1976), and the symbolism associated with Mississippian mounds (Knight 1989), it is likely that the colors of mound stages and mound surfaces were significant, even if those colors were only visible for short periods during and after mound-building events.

Cherokee Townhouses at Coweeta Creek

Townhouses at Coweeta Creek demonstrate some similarities with Mississippian platform mounds, and there are indications that color symbolism was embedded within this sequence of townhouses. This site was excavated from 1965 to 1971 by the Research Laboratories of Anthropology (RLA) at the University of North Carolina (UNC) as part of its Cherokee Archaeological Project (Figure 1; Dickens 1967, 1976, 1978, 1979; B. J. Egloff 1967; K. T. Egloff 1971; Keel 1976; Keel et al. 2002; Ward 2002; Ward and Davis 1999:17–18). At the site were found a series of at least six stages of a townhouse, a ramada beside the townhouse, a plaza, and an area around the plaza with pit features and domestic structures (Figure 2; Rodning 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Schroedl 2000, 2001; Rodning and VanDerwarker 2002; Ward and Davis 1999:183–190). Written descriptions of eighteenth-cen-
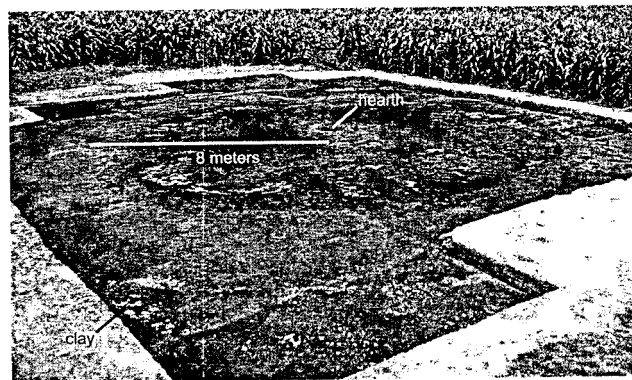

Figure 3. The fifth of six stages of the townhouse at Coweeta Creek. Note the deposits of white clay visible outside the edge of the townhouse. Deposits of white clay and boulders outside the southeastern edge of the townhouse are shown in profile drawings in Figures 5 and 6. Scale is approximate. Photograph taken facing northeast.

tury Cherokee townhouses offer guides to interpreting archaeological remnants of these public structures, but they refer to specific townhouses at specific points in time. References to townhouses in nineteenth-century Cherokee oral tradition likewise offer valuable interpretive guides, but neither oral tradition nor written documents give us the same level of architectural detail, nor the same temporal depth, as archaeological evidence. The following discussion of the series of townhouses at Coweeta Creek concentrates on aspects of this sequence that are analogous to cycles of mound building seen at many sites in the Mississippian Southeast and are related to colors that would have been visible inside and beside the Coweeta Creek townhouse. Oral tradition and documentary evidence demonstrate a symbolic connection between earthen mounds and townhouses in the southern Appalachians, and a set of symbolic meanings associated with red and white, but this ethnohistoric evidence does not lend insight into how Cherokee groups actually created tangible connections between mounds and townhouses, or the ways in which they incorporated color into the built environment of Cherokee towns before the eighteenth century.

The first stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse was a square structure with rounded corners, an entryway in the middle of its southeastern wall, and a central hearth and four roof-support posts (Figure 3). When the second stage of the townhouse was built, the entryway was moved to the southernmost corner of the structure, but it shared the same direction and alignment as the original doorway. Meanwhile, the size, shape, alignment, and placement of hearth and roof-support posts were the same as those in the first stage of the townhouse. Generally, the third and fourth stages of the structure were the same as the second. The fifth and sixth stages of the structure were slightly
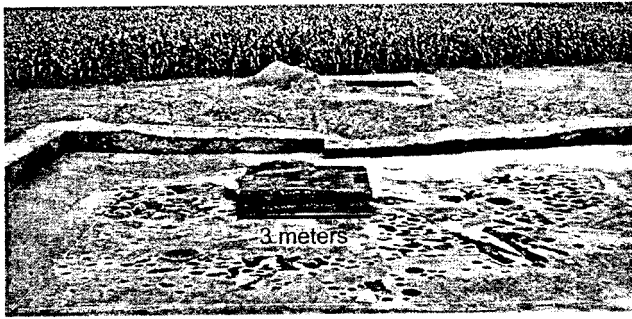
Figure 4. The sequence of successive townhouse floors at Coweeta Creek. The intact block in the middle includes the townhouse hearth and the stratigraphic sequence of floors and architectural rubble between floors. The four long trenches along the right side of the cluster of excavated postholes are entrance trenches associated with the first stage of the townhouse. Scale is approximate. Photograph taken facing north.

larger than—and more rounded than—the first four, and there may have been a different arrangement of roof-support posts than there had been before.

The townhouses at Coweeta Creek were square, with rounded corners, and the arrangement of four posts around a central hearth forms another square within the layout of at least several stages of these public structures. The four corners of the Coweeta Creek townhouses themselves—and, perhaps, the four roof-supports around the hearth—are analogous to the four corners of a platform mound. Not only were the townhouses at Coweeta Creek comparable in shape to platform mounds, but like platform mounds, they also experienced cycles of birth, life, death, and renewal, as they were built, used, burned down, buried, and rebuilt. Each stage of the townhouse was burned down, presumably as part of the series of events during which "old" townhouses were abandoned and buried, and "new" townhouses were rebuilt in their place. The fires in which townhouses burned down would have experienced cycles like other fires—starting out with red and orange flames and, eventually, giving way to white embers and ashes, and, then, smoke and blackened wood and earth—with black connoting the "death" of the townhouse before its rebirth, as a new townhouse, with a new fire. The visibility of burning townhouses would have been comparable to the same phenomenon at Caddoan mounds and mortuary structures, and the red flames that "killed" these structures would turn them black (Pertulla 2009; Sabo and Kay 2006; Schambach 1996). Cycles of building, burning, burying, and rebuilding townhouses likewise would have been comparable to similar sequences evident in Caddoan mounds and in the late prehistoric Snodgrass mound in the Tennessee River Valley in northern Alabama (Krause 1996; Sabo and Kay 2006; Schambach 1996).

Each stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse had a central hearth, which was kept in the same location, in each stage (Figure 4). During the eighteenth century, the fires in the hearths of Cherokee townhouses burned constantly, and there were community leaders whose tasks included keeping the fires burning in townhouse hearths (Corkran 1969; Gearing 1962). Arguably, hearths were red, in both literal and metaphorical senses. The flames from the fires in townhouse hearths would have burned red and orange, and there probably would have been white embers and ashes in those hearths. Meanwhile, there were symbolic associations between fire, in general, and the color red. With only one smokehole in the roof, or no smokehole at all, and one entryway, both public and domestic structures at Mississippian and protohistoric native settlements in the southern Appalachians probably were relatively dark (Gougeon 2006, 2007; Hally 1988, 1994a, 1994b, 2002, 2008; Knight 2007; Polhemus 1987, 1990; Schroedl 1998; Sullivan 1987, 1995). The darkness inside structures may have enhanced the visual effects of red and orange flames, and white ashes and embers, inside hearths themselves.

Outside the townhouse, between the townhouse entryway and the town plaza, was a rectangular ramada, or summer townhouse. Anybody entering and exiting the townhouse would have gone through this ramada. The entryway into the first stage of the townhouse was placed in the middle of the southeastern wall—clusters of burials are placed on both sides of this entryway, and, therefore, people entering and exiting the townhouse moved between these clusters of burials as they moved through the ramada beside the townhouse itself. The entryway into later stages of the townhouse was moved to the southernmost corner of the structure, parallel to the original doorway, but south of it—clusters of burials are also placed on both sides of these later entryways. The placement of these burials suggests that moving into and out of the townhouse, at least in some instances, brought forth memories of ancestral members or ancestral generations of the community, or even memories of the specific individuals buried in those spaces.

The series of townhouses themselves created a mound, not a platform mound per se, but a mound composed of the burnt and buried remnants of successive stages of this public structure, and one in which the floors of successive stages of the townhouse have been identified (Figure 5).[7] As the stack of townhouses grew, it may have been necessary to place a ramp beside the entryway, leading from the plaza through the ramada to the townhouse itself. Boulders and white clay were placed outside the southeastern edge of the townhouse, either as a ramp or an embankment around the townhouse, or a combination of both. These boulders and white clay deposits formed
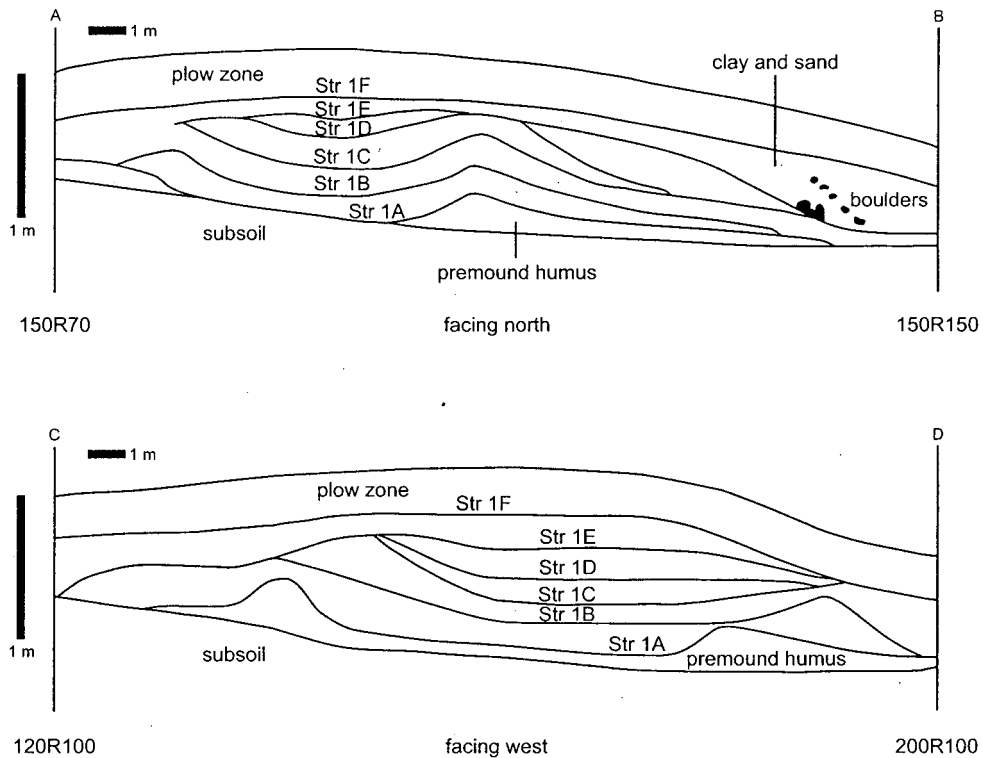
Figure 5. Stratigraphic profiles of the townhouse mound at Coweeta Creek (after Rodning 2002a:12, 2004:88, 2009b:640; Rodning and VanDerwarker 2002:3). Structure 1F is the sixth stage of the townhouse. Structure 1A is the first stage of the townhouse. Locations of these profiles are shown in Figure 2. A version of this map published elsewhere (Rodning 2009b:640) incorrectly labels the direction of the stratigraphic profile shown here on the bottom. I have labeled it correctly ("facing west") here.

a surface connecting the plaza with the entrance into the townhouse.

It is difficult to know exactly what this clay deposit would have looked like when it was placed down at the edge of the townhouse, but it certainly had its white color when it was exposed during excavations, and, therefore, it may have appeared white when the townhouse was in use (Figure 6).[8] If that were the case, and if it extended along the entire southeastern edge of the townhouse, then it would have been a white surface visible from the plaza, from domestic areas in the village adjacent to the plaza and, perhaps, even from the river running along the eastern border of the Coweeta Creek site itself. There is an archaeological site on the east side of the Little Tennessee River—the Coweeta Creek site is on the west side—and, perhaps, the white clay ramp was visible from points across the Little Tennessee River as well.

At least part of the Coweeta Creek plaza was covered with white sand, as evident from sand deposits above the clay plaza surface. As with the white clay deposit beside the townhouse, it is difficult to know exactly what color this surface would have been when the plaza was in use. On the other hand, it is likely that any sand that was spread across the plaza would have been white or at least light-colored.

If the plaza and/or the ramp outside the Coweeta Creek townhouse were white, then it becomes interesting to consider the colors that would have been visible inside the townhouse. With only one entryway, and probably a smokehole above the hearth, it would have been relatively dark inside the structure. In fact, the primary source of light inside the townhouse would have been the fire kept in the townhouse hearth, and, perhaps, one of the colors generated by those fires was red, as well as gray or white from embers and ash in the hearth. Given the significance of red and white symbolism in Native American cosmology and social organization in the Southeast, it may be no accident that there are red and white elements in the Coweeta Creek townhouse and the space outside it. As is apparent from ethnohistoric evidence, Cherokee townhouses were settings for many kinds of events and activities, including those associated with warfare, and those associated with peace. Symbolically, then, Cherokee townhouses were both "red" and "white" structures. From this perspective, it makes sense that these different colors were incorporated within the Coweeta Creek townhouse.

For the sake of consideration, and to take the possibility of color symbolism and structural duality further, we might note the traditional association
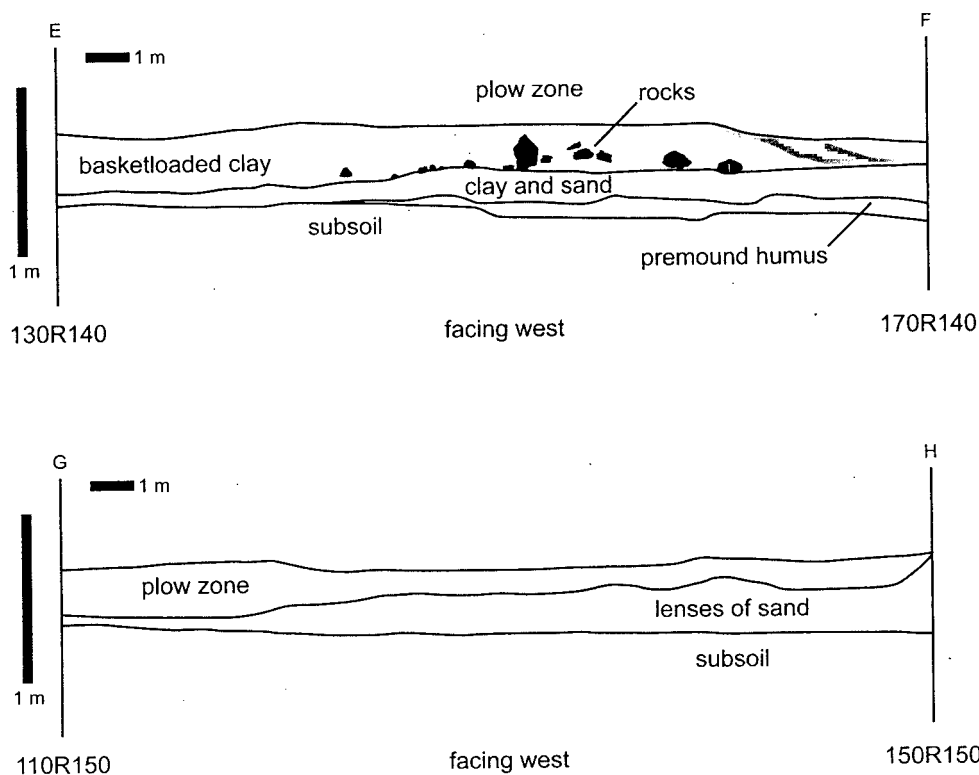
Figure 6. Stratigraphic profiles of deposits outside the southeastern edge of the townhouse at Coweeta Creek (after Rodning 2004:89). Locations of these profiles are shown in Figure 2.

between the color red and the east, as the cardinal direction associated with the sun. There is also the possibility of the association between the south and the color white, which, again, symbolizes peace. Perhaps the white ramp on the southeastern side of the Coweeta Creek townhouse balances the "red" symbolism associated with the rising sun in the east while also manifesting the "white" symbolism associated with the south. Along the same lines, consider the contrast between white clay outside the southeastern edge of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, as compared to the darkness within, at points west of the entryway. Another possibility to consider is that a white ramp was added to the space outside the Coweeta Creek townhouse at a point when the Coweeta Creek community could claim status as an "old" town, and with respect to this idea it should be noted that the white clay deposit at the southeastern edge of the mound was associated with late stages of the townhouse, perhaps even its last stage.

My suggestion that there may have been color symbolism in the Coweeta Creek townhouse is admittedly speculative and difficult to assess on archaeological grounds alone, in part because it is difficult to know exactly what colors would have been visible in and around the townhouse during the 1600s and early 1700s. However, there is ethnohistoric evidence of color

symbolism in Cherokee and other native societies of the Southeast (Hudson 1976:126, 132). Meanwhile, there is evidence about color symbolism in relation to Cherokee townhouses, in particular, including references to red and white posts and red and white flags placed beside townhouses during the 1700s and 1800s (Gearing 1962:4, 5). Even if the white clay and sand lost some of their distinctive coloring after exposure to sunlight and weather, the events during which they were added to the Coweeta Creek townhouse and plaza may have conferred white symbolism on them, symbolism that endured even after colors themselves may have faded. Red and black symbolism, related to warfare and death, would have accumulated within the townhouse through practices of tending fires in its hearth, and through periodic episodes of burning the townhouse down, burying it, and rebuilding it.

Discussion and Conclusions

The sequence of townhouses at Coweeta Creek, dating to the 1600s and early 1700s, corresponds to a period of considerable geopolitical instability and change in the Native American landscape of the Southeast (Beck 2009; Bowne 2000, 2005, 2006, 2009; Ethridge 1984, 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Fox 2009; Gallay

2002; Hatley 1993; Meyers 2009; Smith 1987, 1989, 1994, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006; Waselkov 1989, 1993, 1994). Townhouses like those at Coweeta Creek created settings for the practice of public life in Cherokee towns. Townhouses were architectural landmarks for the communities associated with them, and they materialized the identity of a local group of households as a town. In my view, similarities between these structures and late prehistoric platform mounds contributed to the architectural symbolism of protohistoric and historic Cherokee townhouses.

Building and rebuilding this townhouse in place anchored the Cherokee town at Coweeta Creek to a particular point within the landscape. Meanwhile, it referred to the symbolism of Mississippian platform mounds. From this perspective, the sequence of townhouses at Coweeta Creek essentially represents a form of mound building and an effort to connect each stage of this public structure to its predecessors and successors, thereby creating a sense of stability within a rapidly changing cultural landscape. The conduct of diplomacy and warfare greatly affected native groups in eastern North America during the 1600s and 1700s. The dual emphasis on diplomacy (white) and war (red) by native groups in these conditions may have been materialized in public structures like the Coweeta Creek townhouse.

Associations between Cherokee townhouses and the colors red, white, and black, meanwhile, added another dimension to the symbolism manifested in public architecture, and public spaces more generally. In the case of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, fires were kept burning within its hearth, and fires were set to burn down the entire townhouse periodically. The burned remnants of the townhouse, of course, were black—the color of death—and, then, the townhouse was rebuilt atop the buried remnants of its predecessors, symbolizing the rebirth and renewal of the town itself. The significance of the Coweeta Creek townhouse mound derives in part from its history, including cycles of building, tending the fire in the townhouse hearth (red), burning the structure down (black), burying and rebuilding it, and spreading white clay and sand across surfaces in and around the townhouse itself. Colors were part of the architecture of this public structure, they were part of the experience of events that took place within it, and they were visual and mnemonic cues for the "red" and "white" activities associated with the townhouse itself. Townhouses were hubs of public life, and just as parallels to earthen mounds added to the roles of townhouses as landmarks, the colors seen in the Coweeta Creek townhouse were related to its roles in the public life of a Cherokee town. The "red" and "white" elements of this public structure reflected its symbolic significance as an architectural space in which deliberations about conflict and warfare, alliance and trade, and peace and diplomacy took place, all of which were critical to community survival in eastern North America during the protohistoric period.

Notes

[1] The concept that architectural spaces can and do manifest cosmic symbolism and cosmological knowledge can be traced to Mircea Eliade (1954:12–13, 1957) and his writings about the phenomenon of an *axis mundi*, connecting heaven and earth—or, more generally, points within the built environment and landscape at which different worldly domains intersect. With reference to men's houses in New Guinea, and to the sacred lodges of the Sioux and Algonquian peoples of North America, Eliade (1957:46) writes that the roofs of these structures represent the sky, the floors represent the earth, and the four sides of these structures themselves correspond to four directions in cosmic space. It is not difficult to relate these points to the characteristics of Cherokee townhouses, and we could add the presence of four roof-support posts around a central hearth as an additional level of architectural symbolism. These roof-support posts connect the floor (the earth) with the roof (and the upper world), central hearths connect the earth with the lower world, and all of these architectural elements create a center, or *axis mundi*, within the built environment of every Cherokee town.

[2] These colors have symbolic power in many traditional societies around the world. As part of his ethnographic study of Ndembu rites of passage in West Africa, Turner (1967) emphasizes the tripartite scheme of red, black, and white, with white symbolizing procreation and milk; red symbolizing blood, warfare, and group membership; and black symbolizing liminal states and transitions from social status to another. With reference to the Yoruba and other groups in West Africa, Keates (2002) relates white with spirituality, red with liminality, and black with the imperfect world of the living. Drewal (1998) and Mason (1998) explore color symbolism in Yoruba beadwork in Africa and in the Americas, demonstrating the roles that colors play in Yoruba social memory; in social differentiation by age, status, and gender; and in ritual practices and thought through which ancestors and other spirits enter the world of the living. In her lengthy study of the history and prehistory of copper in Africa, Herbert (1984) refers to copper as "red gold," which, therefore, relates copper to the symbolic meanings of the color red, including life, blood, power, fire, and conflict (Herbert 1984:277–280).

[3] It is likely that similar cosmological symbolism is manifested in Mississippian domestic structures, in addition to the more practical design considerations related to raw materials, longevity, directionality, and basic household needs for domestic activity areas. Elizabeth Pauls (2005; Prine 2000) has explored ritual and symbolic aspects of Plains earth-lodges, for example, identifying ideational dimensions of structural elements within them. James Brown (2007) has considered the meanings of "social houses"—manifested in architecture and burials—as fundamental units of Mississippian polities. My paper here concentrates on the architectural symbolism of Cherokee public structures, but it also would be worthwhile to consider the symbolic properties of Cherokee dwellings and Mississippian and protohistoric dwellings elsewhere in the Southeast.

[4] According to Cherokee oral tradition, mythical warriors emerged from the Nequassee mound to help warriors from the Cherokee town of Nequassee win a battle against enemy attackers (Mooney 1900:336–337). It is interesting to note that a similar theme is apparent in the oral tradition of Muskogean speakers in the Southeast, including references to chambers inside earthen mounds for fasting and praying and a chamber in a mound at the Creek town of Coweta, where Creek warriors hid in preparing an ambush against Cherokee warriors (Miller 2001:164–165).

[5] In other written versions of this myth, different animals participate in the attempt to bring fire back to earth, including the Possum (whose hair is singed), the Buzzard (whose feathers are charred black), and the Dragonfly (Mooney 1900:431).

[6] With respect to the quadrilateral shape of platform mounds and Cherokee townhouses, it is worth noting that in this origin myth, the earth is a great island, floating in water, suspended by cords connecting the sky to each of the four cardinal points and corners of the earth itself (Mooney 1900:239). The four corners of the townhouses at the Coweeta Creek site are close to the cardinal points of south, east, north, and west. Meanwhile, Mooney (1900:431) relates the "sacred four ... to the four cardinal points, while seven, besides these, includes also 'above,' 'below,' and 'here in the center.'" At least four stages of the Coweeta Creek townhouse have four roof-support posts (symbolizing the four cords?) placed around the central hearth (which is "here in the center" but may also be connected to the smokehole "above" and the ground "below"?). Additionally, Mooney (1900:431) notes that "in sacred Cherokee formulas the spirits of the East,

South, West, and North are, respectively, Red, White, Black, and Blue, and each color has also its own symbolic meaning of Power (War), Peace, Death, and Defeat."

[7] In his article on the symbolism of Mississippian mounds, Vernon Knight (1989:282–283, 2006:424) has noted that "collapsed Cherokee townhouses of the historic era were ritually buried beneath a mantle of earth and clay, and the Cherokees believed that the large earthen mound in the town of Toqua, in east Tennessee, had been built in this manner." Although Coweeta Creek is not noted specifically in Knight's paper (only brief descriptions of the Coweeta Creek townhouse had been published when his paper was written), I think his point is applicable to the sequence of Cherokee townhouses at the Coweeta Creek site.

[8] In his summary of archaeological knowledge in 1976 about Cherokee history and prehistory in western North Carolina, Bennie Keel (1976:216) has noted, "The development of this level of Cherokee Culture was based on an efficient adaptation to the local environment.... The lack of extensive expanses of floodplains in the mountains seems to argue against the large concentrations of population that were common in other areas of the eastern United States. What apparently developed was a pattern of dispersed farmsteads or hamlets linked to small ceremonial centers.... At the same time such a dispersion of population may account for the lack of development of a centralized political organization. The development of such a political organization did not come about until dealing with European powers became a necessity. The evolution of Cherokee political development from a primary priest state to a political state has been treated by Fred Gearing (1962) and is highly recommended for study." In fact, in following his advice, and in heeding his advice about the possible significance of the white clay added to the southeast side of the Coweeta Creek townhouse mound, I found new significance in Gearing's comments about Cherokee color symbolism and structural dualism in Cherokee social and political organization.

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