

University of Louisville

## ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

12-2013

### Site 15SP202 and the Mississippian presence at the falls of the Ohio River.

William Travis Fisher 1983-  
*University of Louisville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Fisher, William Travis 1983-, "Site 15SP202 and the Mississippian presence at the falls of the Ohio River." (2013). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 438.  
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/438>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact [thinkir@louisville.edu](mailto:thinkir@louisville.edu).

SITE 15SP202 AND THE MISSISSIPPIAN PRESENCE AT THE FALLS OF THE  
OHIO RIVER

By

William Travis Fisher

B.A., Centre College, 2006

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology

University of Louisville

Louisville, KY

December 2013



SITE 15SP202 AND THE MISSISSIPPIAN PRESENCE AT THE FALLS OF THE  
OHIO RIVER

By

William Travis Fisher

B.A., Centre College, 2006

A Thesis Approved on

December 6, 2013

By the following Thesis Committee:

---

Jonathan Haws

---

William Hill

---

Philip DiBlasi

## ABSTRACT

### SITE 15SP202 AND THE MISSISSIPPIAN PRESENCE AT THE FALLS OF THE OHIO RIVER

William Travis Fisher

December 6, 2013

The following paper is an analysis of the decorated ceramics associated with site 15SP202, a Mississippi Period site in Spencer County, Kentucky. The ceramics were then used to determine whether the site had been classified correctly by its original investigator, due to the ambiguity often associated with assigning temporal and cultural affiliation to late prehistoric sites in the Falls of the Ohio River region. After the initial analysis, the author compared and contrasted 15SP202 with other known and more fully excavated Mississippian sites in the region, in an attempt to integrate the site in question into a wider regional context. Ultimately, the author posits that site 15SP202 adds to the growing body of archaeological work that supports a sustained, substantial, and unique Mississippian occupation in the Falls of the Ohio River region.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: MISSISSIPPIAN BACKGROUND.....	4
CHAPTER 3: FALLS MISSISSIPPIAN: PAST RESEARCH.....	20
THE McALPINE SITE.....	27
THE PRATHER SITE.....	29
THE SMITH-SUTTON AND ELLINGSWORTH SITES.....	31
CHAPTER 4: SITE 15SP202.....	33
CHAPTER 5: 15SP202 POTTERY ANALYSIS.....	46
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON OF RESULTS.....	59
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.....	67
REFERENCES.....	70
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	76

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Falls of the Ohio Mississippian Sites.....	25
2. Approximate Location of 15SP202.....	34
3. Decorated Sherd 1.....	51
4. Decorated Sherd 2.....	52
5. Decorated Sherd 3.....	53
6. Plain Rim 1.....	54
7. Plain Rim 2.....	55
8. Handle 1.....	56
9. Handle 2.....	57
10. Chronology for Falls Mississippian Sites w/ Comparative Angle Phases.....	64

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi Period (A.D. 1000-1500) is at the heart of much of the most interesting archaeological research in the North American Midwest and Southeast. The societies that comprise what is defined as Mississippian are some of the most socially and politically complex to arise in North America. In the last decade, there has been a renewed focus on what exactly “Mississippian” as a term means, and how much the societies that have been lumped together under this moniker can really be considered part of a contiguous cultural construct. As a result, there has been a trend toward viewing the various polities that existed during the Mississippi Period on their own terms and to avoid reducing them to simple proxies for preexisting cultural/societal frameworks used in the past to essentialize what a “Mississippian” society should look like (Peebles 1990: 24, 26; Pauketat 2007: 81-87).

One area of Mississippian studies in which this new approach is particularly useful is in the examination of Mississippian occupations on the peripheries of the traditional Mississippian heartlands. The “frontier” zones at the fringes of Mississippian settlement and influence have often been ignored, but can in fact reveal much about what it means to be Mississippian and how Mississippian polities developed in the face of alternative or competing societies (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995:488). The Falls of the

Ohio region is one such area, a border zone between the great Mississippian polities of the Lower Ohio River Valley and the smaller and culturally distinct Fort Ancient peoples to the north and east. Recent research has begun to reveal that the Falls of the Ohio region, located at Louisville, Kentucky, was home to a full fledged Mississippian occupation, an occupation that is only now being given serious attention by researchers. The Mississippian occupation of the Falls of the Ohio River Region is one of the most pressing and little understood questions in the archaeology of southern Indiana and the Louisville area of Kentucky. Expanding knowledge about the nature of the Mississippian occupation in the Falls Region can provide new insights into how Mississippianism spread, the nature of Mississippian societies on the periphery of the Mississippian world, and the nature of interactions between the Mississippian world and the societies that bordered it.

In this study I will attempt to expand our understanding of the Mississippian occupation in the Falls of the Ohio region by looking at a small site, 15SP202, in Spencer County, Kentucky and integrating it into the current body of knowledge about Falls Mississippian. In order to further define the nature of Falls Mississippian, I will also compare and attempt to integrate the various important Mississippian archaeological and historical investigations that have occurred in the region over the past decade. In addition, I will review what Mississippian means in general and how it is defined at present, so that the Falls occupation can be compared and contrasted to Mississippian societies in general.

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of some of the prevalent literature and current archaeological research concerning the Mississippi Period. In Chapter 3, I narrow my

focus to the research that has been carried out on the Falls Mississippian presence, looking at several important sites that have been excavated in recent years as well as evidence from historical accounts pertaining to a Mississippian presence at the Falls of the Ohio. In Chapter 4, I discuss site 15SP202, a small Mississippian site in Spencer County, KY and explore the utility of looking at such a site. In Chapter 5, I describe the ceramics from site 15SP202. In Chapter 6, I discuss the significant aspects of the ceramics from 15SP202 and compare them to other Falls Mississippian sites as well as the Angel Mounds, the nearest large Mississippian complex on the Ohio River. In Chapter 7, I conclude my discussion of the Falls Mississippian occupation and the place of site 15SP202 in that occupation, with a view towards wider regional research and integration of the Mississippian presence in the Falls region into the wider body of Mississippian research.

## CHAPTER 2

### MISSISSIPPIAN BACKGROUND

The final stage of North American prehistory in the Southeast and Midwest, before the arrival of Europeans, is commonly referred to by archaeologists as the Mississippi Period and given a temporal range of about A.D. 1000-1550 (Blitz 2010: 3). But what traits or characteristics define the Mississippi Period? Is Mississippianism an ideological or religious construct? Or is it material? Or a set of shared architectural traits?

Obviously, these are very significant questions for archaeologists interested in the Mississippian world. The Mississippi Period saw the rise of arguably the most complex societies to emerge in Eastern North America, or even in North America as a whole. Its religious/ceremonial structures, architecture, artistic styles, and subsistence patterns far surpass in complexity anything that had preceded them. Its relatively fast rise suggests a sort of sudden cultural efflorescence, a rapid escalation in social complexity that reworked native cultures and landscapes (Pauketat 2009: 6, 23-24). With this in mind, answering many of the questions posed above in definitive terms begins to seem quite daunting. Early on Mississippian was defined by a simple list of physical traits that excluded any real examination of cultural similarities or differences between groups. This approach was broad, overly reliant on ceramic types, and lacked resolution, allowing

classification without any real understanding of the polities and cultures in question (Muller 1986: 170-171). These type-class approaches to classifying Mississippian societies also obscured regional and inter-site differences, forcing investigations into any given site to comply with a rigid set of guidelines or traits that stifled fresh approaches (Blitz 2010: 3).

The study and interpretation of Mississippian societies has followed many of the movements that have characterized archaeological thought in recent decades. The effects of extreme relativism and post-modernism have crept into the discipline, totalizing all theories as inherently equal and constricting researchers capacities to make meaningful statements about given work. The essentializing tendencies of systems thinking and the over quantified and rule bound nature of positivist approaches have also constricted the ways that archaeologists can speak about Mississippian in a theoretical way (Peebles 1990: 23-25; Johnson 1999:67-69, 37-40; Trigger 1989: 294-296).

Political economy based approaches, often tied philosophically to Marxism, have found a place in Mississippian archaeology, producing some very interesting theories about the development of hierarchical societies and the control of materially based power by elites in pre-capitalist societies. The materialist basis provides an attractive theoretical framework especially for Mississippian archaeology, because the material remains of society are all that is left to those studying the Mississippian world. The materialist tensions inherent in Marxist dialectical change are appealing descriptive models for the often unclear nature of elite control and common resistance in Mississippian societies. Favored by archaeologists who find disagreement with the totalizing of adaptationist systems approaches, Marxism makes clear that societies are governed by their own

particular structures, and that rules applied from one time or place may not be relevant or applicable to another (Johnson 1999: 92-94; Cobb 2000: 5-9).

Mississippian societies make good models for studying pre-capitalist hierarchies, because they have been truncated by European contact, preserved archaeologically with minimal influence from later societies that may taint interpretation of political and economic development in those early hierarchies (Muller 1997: 43-44). Muller examined control of production of material goods by elites, differences in access to subsistence, access to exotic goods, and control of agriculture and land. In all these cases Muller concludes, within a political economic framework, that Mississippian elites did not exert very much control and power over non-elites, and that the main purpose for elite power at all was for the redistribution and control of excess production in times of hardship (Muller 1997:42-50).

The world-systems perspective has also seen use as an interpretive schema for understanding Mississippian societies and hierarchies. Like the Marxist political economy described above, the world-systems approach also relies on material goods and the control and production of materials as the basis of elite power. Unlike the political economic approach, the world-systems perspective situates Mississippian elite power only in the control, exchange, and production of luxury and exotic goods, rather than in subsistence control. Mississippian elites gained power by controlling luxury goods, and their people supported them because they wanted access to those goods in order to strengthen and reaffirm their place in society, which was determined by their possession and access to luxury goods (Peregrine 1992: 1-9). As an explanatory system for Mississippian elite power, the world-systems perspective lacks depth, relying on luxury

goods as an indicator of status without examining what lies behind their value as status markers. The circular reasoning embedded within the entire system is also problematic.

In recent years, a shift has been made in Mississippian archaeology away from outlining the political and economic models that defined Mississippian societies in terms of set forms of rules or the orderly and internally generated cycling of chiefdoms, as well as diverging from redistributive explanations for Mississippian elite power (Rees 1997: 113-114). In place of these ideas a new historical-processual approach, advocated most strongly by Pauketat, would seem to provide the best theoretical schema for understanding and analyzing the politics, histories, and social structures that comprise what archaeologists call Mississippian. This approach emphasizes the role of individual agency in creating and being created by society. The interplay between individuals within their society and their relation to the material and social aspects of their society at a given time both constrain individual action and enable it. The collective action of individuals in society generates that society as well as the institutions of power that arise from it. The importance of history and agency is emphasized in interpreting what happened in Mississippian societies, as well as the abandonment of top down, a priori approaches to understanding the societies of the late prehistoric South and Midwest (Pauketat 2007: 14-16; Pauketat 2002: 160-161; Dobres and Robb 2000: 7,8, 10-13; Emerson and Pauketat 2002: 118-119). In terms of my work here, this approach has had the most effect on my thinking.

Archaeology has only just begun to truly understand and reevaluate the nature of Mississippian societies. Theoretical discussions aside, there is a general, pragmatic

consensus among archaeologists when it comes to defining the societies and cultures that comprise the Mississippi Period.

First, the Mississippi Period can be demarcated by the adoption of and intensification of certain religious/ceremonial complexes, commonly referred to as the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. Associated with this rise in prominence of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex was the advent of social groups whose authority was based in various aspects of religious ceremonial practice or war, and who rose to positions of prominence and power within Mississippian societies. These new elite groups were defined by their exclusivity, a new trait in North American leadership at the time. The composition of and entry into these groups was controlled and closely guarded, tied to position and blood rather than merit or social utility (Lewis and Stout 1998: xi; Rees 1997: 115-116; Steinen 1992: 132-136). These groups passed their power on through heredity and kinship ties, and were closely associated with another of the defining characteristics of Mississippianism: the large earthen mounds and mound centers that are the most obvious and spectacular remnants of their societies (Peebles 1990: 25-26). The development of hereditary classes and a more ranked and socially stratified society, validated and bolstered by the widespread adoption of new religious and ceremonial practices, is perhaps the most important and significant differentiating factor between the Mississippian world and the societies that preceded it (Cobb 2003: 65, 69; Muller 1996: 7).

Of course, defining social stratification and religious practice is not always the most direct way to assign a given site to the Mississippi Period. Physical markers and site structure give archaeologists a more direct route to defining what is and is not

Mississippian. Perhaps the clearest remaining physical representation of Mississippianism is the flat-topped earthen mound. Mounds, and the plazas associated with them, formed the nucleus of most of the larger Mississippian towns. The mounds served as the ceremonial center of Mississippian life, perhaps representing physically the sacred cosmology that seems to have played such a large role in Mississippian society. The similarities of the central mound complexes across the Mississippian world would have communicated a message that cut through geographic and ethnic barriers, stating emphatically that this place is Mississippian (Lewis and Stout 1998: 152). As mentioned above, the mounds themselves would have served as clear examples of the power of the elite groups that controlled their construction and use, a power that would have been reflected in the beliefs of common individuals who participated in mound construction and validated the power of the mounds and the elites that utilized them. In a very literal sense, mounds placed leaders above the common people, creating a constant physical reminder of elite authority within the community (Lewis and Stout 1998: 156; Pauketat 2000: 118, 123-124).

It has also been proposed that the existence of mounds at a site can be used to date the advent of particular leaders. The mounds themselves can be seen to indicate that an elite leader is present at a given site; if the mounds are physical expressions of ideological elite power, then a paramount elite can be assumed to have been present at a site when the largest mound was constructed. In addition, the successive layers added to mounds over given periods of time can be seen as reaffirmations of the power of a given elite or particular lineage. These capping episodes, along with the construction of new mounds or entirely new mound centers, can also be interpreted as the physical

representation of the rise to power of new leaders and their lineages. Dating the mounds and the capping episodes, then, can provide investigators with temporal sequences for the political shifts within given Mississippian polities. This, in turn, can be used to gauge the relative stability or fluctuation of political control by particular elites and their lineages, clans, factions, etc. (Wesler 2006: 142-144; Cobb 2003: 69).

In addition to allowing archaeologists to differentiate between leaders and gauge political stability, the construction of mounds should be able to show whether mounds were built as a result of the spread of chiefly power from a central point, or through the concurrent ascent of multiple strong leaders. This could be used to evaluate the power of the larger mound centers; if mound building occurred all at once, it would suggest that a region had come under the influence of a particular center of power, and the mounds, as physical representations of the power of this central polity, would have been constructed all at once across the major towns of the newly assimilated territory. However, if the mounds were built at different times, it could suggest that power was disseminated across multiple sites, in the hands of multiple powerful elites (Wesler 2006: 142-145).

Initial application of this theory to the empirical Mississippian archaeological record has shown that the latter would appear to be true, at least in Western Kentucky. In that region it does not appear that mound building emanated from the rise of one central, powerful center such as the Kincaid site, but that it sprang up at different times in different towns (Wesler 2006: 153). Understanding the temporal relationships between mound building episodes in Western Kentucky could add significantly to an understanding of the relationships between these various centers, and the nature of political and ideological power within and amongst these Western Kentucky

Mississippian polities (Wesler 2006: 145). More widely, the construction of detailed chronologies for mound construction episodes could help researchers create a more nuanced picture of political and power relations amongst polities and mound centers across the Mississippian world.

Equally important to the mound in Mississippian site structure is the plaza. Plazas are very clear evidence that a given site is Mississippian. There are virtually no Mississippian towns that do not contain a plaza, even if they do not have a mound (Lewis and Stout 1998: 151). Like mounds, the plaza seems to have been integral to the ceremonial and political life of the Mississippian town, with the mounds of the elites surrounding, controlling, and separating the plaza from the rest of the polity (Lewis and Stout 1998: 159-165). Though mounds are often times given more import than plazas, the mound-plaza complex together represents the architectural heart of Mississippian town planning and construction, a physical representation of ideology and hierarchy.

The location of houses in Mississippian towns also seems to have been planned. Houses are often situated in semi-circular arrangements around courtyards or in small clusters, with open areas separating the discreet clusters. Some towns also situated their houses in straight rows, with a loose grid of passageways around the houses. Although the houses were ordered and not simply placed at random, there is not much evidence to support elite control of house organization (Lewis and Stout 1998: 154-155).

Recent investigations at the Moundville site in Alabama have shed more light on the social and political structure of Mississippian town planning and layout. As mentioned above, the plaza and mound areas in Mississippian towns were seen as segregated from the house areas that surrounded them. Ideologically and politically this is

most likely true. The plaza and mounds represent elite power, and as such they are a controlled space and granted significance. However, at Moundville there is very good evidence that the social separation between the mound and plaza area and the surrounding houses may not have been as severe as the political and hierarchical separations appear to have been. At Moundville, it seems that each mound around the plaza, of which there are 29, was associated with a particular corporate group. These clans had their own mound, perhaps home to their leader or leaders, with their houses grouped around the side of the mound facing away from the plaza. In addition to these individual clan mound groups, there was also a preeminent mound, indicating a central elite leader or clan (Blitz 2010: 8-9). This site organization sheds light on the political organization of Mississippian society, pointing towards a fractious and multilayered political structure rather than domination by one all-powerful leader or group. In a very tangible way, the layout of Moundville reinforces the importance of plaza and mound groups as the physical manifestation of elite power, while at the same time forcing archaeologists to view Mississippian power as a much more nuanced and complex political system.

Ultimately, the platform mounds and mound centers represent physically the new ideological power that Mississippian elites clothed themselves in as a way to justify their political control of a particular region or polity. The rise of this new ideology, the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex, as mentioned above, can be seen as perhaps the most significant hallmark of Mississippian culture (Kelly et. al. 2007: 58, 86). The source of this new ideology, if it could be definitively identified, could lead to significant advances

in understanding and interpreting the rise of Mississippianism as a pan-regional societal and cultural construct.

Although these religious/ceremonial factors and the social complexity that seems to have developed from and/or alongside them are ultimately the best way to distinguish Mississippian societies from earlier societies, these characteristics are often extremely difficult to identify in the archaeological record. Besides the mounds and plazas, which are themselves found only at larger Mississippian sites, most physical artifacts associated with Mississippian ceremonialism and ideology do not survive well in the archaeological record. Although they have been defined through archaeology, the goods associated with the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex are extremely rare at most excavations. Many Mississippian sites are also absent mounds, especially smaller sites. As a result, archaeologists have developed other ways to differentiate Mississippian sites or site components that do not rely on sacred or ceremonial objects or the presence of mounds, instead referencing the more common artifacts and subsistence goods of everyday life.

In terms of subsistence, the presence of corn at a given site is strong evidence for a Mississippian occupation. One of the defining characteristics of the Mississippian period is the intensified cultivation of maize, particularly a variety known as Midwestern Twelve (French et al. 2010: 9, 358-359; Lewis 1996: 129; Delcourt and Delcourt 2004). The intensified cultivation of maize occurs at the same time that political structures within Mississippian societies begin to become more complex and parallel the rise of strong elites and increased political complexity, all of which points toward the control and production of maize and other foodstuffs, as well as the maintenance of complex agriculture systems, as legitimizing factors in elite power (Rees 1997:114-116). Corn is

often times found when excavating at Mississippian sites, and is a good diagnostic artifact for use in site classification.

In addition to corn, the presence of small, triangular projectile points is also used to establish that a given site is Mississippian. These points occur across large areas with very little variation in their form. They were used as arrow points, and hence are much smaller than points associated with previous time periods before the adoption of the bow and arrow. There are some significant stylistic variations in certain regions, such as the points associated with Cahokia, but overall Mississippian projectile points have a much lower level of stylistic and regional variation than preceding periods (Justice 1987: 224-227; Muller 1986: 170; French et al. 2010: 247-268; Carmean 2009: 220).

Another way in which the Mississippi Period is defined archaeologically is the style of their house construction. House construction seems to follow a pretty standard model across the geographical extent of the Mississippian world. Houses were mostly rectangular, with pitched, thatched roofs. Although the rectangular house shape is usually an indicator of Mississippian settlement, they also built circular, flexed-frame pole structures as well (French et al. 2010: 9-10). Mississippian peoples built their houses by digging trenches into which they set structural wall support poles (Lewis 1996: 129). These wall trenches are a hallmark of Mississippian house construction and are therefore very useful in differentiating Mississippian settlements from those of previous time periods in the archaeological record. In many ways the structures of the Woodland people that preceded the Mississippians were very similar to the ones that the Mississippians built, making the wall trench, which Woodland peoples did not use, all the more important when determining a site's cultural affiliation. After the construction of house

walls, the Mississippians used lighter wood and cane to create a framework over which clay was smeared, a system known as wattle and daub. Hence, clay plaster daub and the pits used to mix wall plaster are often found when excavating Mississippian sites (Muller 1986: 191; Lewis 1996: 134).

Although the preceding Mississippian site traits are important, perhaps the most commonly used indicator for archaeologists defining Mississippian sites is shell-tempered pottery. The presence of shell-tempered pottery is almost always associated with a Mississippian occupation. Shell tempering was originally what lead archaeologists in the first half of the twentieth century to coin the term “Mississippian”, which they used to define the ceramic tradition associated with this type of paste (Muller 1986: 170; Lewis 1996: 129). The use of shell as a tempering agent was adopted rapidly across most of the Eastern Woodlands and largely replaced the use of grog (crushed bits of old pottery) or grit (sand or bits of crushed stone) as tempering agents. The adoption of shell temper also saw a rise in the production and use of ceramics generally. The speed and ubiquity with which shell temper was adopted, as well as its coincidental appearance with other defining factors of the Mississippian lifestyle, have lead it to become perhaps the most definitive temporal marker for the shift to the Mississippi Period (Teltser 1993: 531). The most common types, Mississippi Plain and Bell Plain, are the ubiquitous pottery found at most Mississippian sites and are not helpful in indicating either temporal or spatial affiliation, as they occur across most of the Mississippian world and across most of the temporal expanse that is defined as Mississippian. The exception to this is the lack of Bell Plain pottery at early Mississippian sites, but even this can be biased by the

inexact and subjective nature of identifying the two pastes (Phillips 1971: 58-61, 130-135).

Despite its ubiquity across the Mississippian world, there is some evidence to suggest that not all areas within the Mississippian geographical sphere adopted shell tempering, and that the time frame for the adoption of shell tempering may not be as clear-cut as has been supposed (Feathers and Peacock 2008: 288). Although these observations pose some very interesting questions, it does not cast any real doubt on the association between the Mississippi Period and shell-tempered pottery.

Although these tangible, physical characteristics of Mississippian material culture are useful in identifying a particular site as Mississippian or not, they do not really define or give meaning to Mississippian culture. These physical objects and architectural remnants would have been integral to what it meant to be Mississippian, but they would only have gained that meaning through the ideologies and practices of the people who lived with and used them in their daily lives. Hence, we return back to attempting to define Mississippian through ideological and political terms, in order that the material remains discovered through excavation can become more than simply artifacts of stone and ceramic, floating in a void, but can instead communicate the lives of those who created and utilized them.

Of course, the elephant in the room in any discussion of Mississippian archaeology is Cahokia. Around the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Late Woodland village of Old Cahokia was suddenly and dramatically reorganized into New Cahokia, a planned center of mounds and plazas. This New Cahokia is the largest known Mississippian mound complex, with its largest mound, Monks' Mound, standing as the largest of all the

Mississippian platform mounds and the third largest man-made structure in the North America before European contact. The complex spanned 10 square kilometers at the least and contained more than 100 individual mounds, being part of a wider group of mound sites that sprawled across the American Bottom in what is now St. Louis, Missouri (Pauketat 2009: 2, 22-23; Pauketat 2005: 197; Milner 2006: 1; Pauketat 2002: 153-155; Holt 2009: 231; Cobb 2000: 13). Cahokia is nearly 5 times larger than the next largest mound center at Moundville, Alabama (Emerson and Hargrave 2000: 3-4). Though perhaps not the first truly Mississippian mound complex, Cahokia was one of the earliest and certainly the largest, considered by many archaeologists to be unique amongst Mississippian centers and leading some investigators to designate it the “Mississippian Heartland” (Pauketat 2005: 196). It also appears that Cahokia became a central point for the migration and coalescence of diverse ethnic groups, perhaps drawn to the large complex by its uniqueness or its political and ideological pull (Emerson and Hargrave 2000: 17-19). In addition, many objects manufactured at Cahokia with specifically Cahokian traits have been found at many other Mississippian sites in the Midwest and Southeast, lending credence to the idea that Cahokia played a significant role in the spread of Mississippian ideologies (Pauketat 2005: 195; Pauketat 2009: 46-50; Emerson, Hughes, Hynes, and Wisseman 2003: 301-306). Despite its clear size advantage over other Mississippian complexes, archaeologists still argue over the size of its population, the extent of elite control over its productive forces, and the influence that it exerted in the wider Mississippian world. On one hand, some archaeologists have compared Cahokia to an emergent state, while others have shied away from such interpretations, preferring to consider Cahokia as only an exceptionally large version of a

typical Mississippian chiefdom (Pauketat 2007: 143-162; Milner 2006: 13-14, 129, 176; Kehoe 1998: 171; Holt 2009: 232- 235, 242-244). On top of these disagreements, the even more contentious suggestion has been made that Cahokia, and by extension the rest of the Mississippian world, had connections to the Toltec civilization of central Mexico, although solid, physical evidence for this contention is lacking (Kehoe 1998: 169-171). The central place of Cahokia in any assessment of Mississippianism cannot be denied, and must always be kept in the back of any Mississippianist's mind. Whether Cahokia was the heartland of Mississippian ideology or whether it was simply the greatest among equals, it must be considered carefully when doing research on Mississippian occupations across the Midwest and Southeast. The lack of a Cahokian connection in the region examined in this thesis, the Falls of the Ohio River region, is probably due more to lack of adequate archaeological survey than actual lack of connection. The nearest large mound complex to the Falls region, west on the Ohio River, the Angel Mounds, has large amounts of Cahokia style pottery (Hilgeman 2000: 213-214), increasing the likelihood, though speculative, that Cahokia style artifacts will likely be discovered in the Falls region in the future.

Archaeology has shown that the Mississippians were there, now it needs to turn its focus upon what they were doing, why they built the places they did, and what their lives were like. Unfortunately for those interested in the matter, the Mississippians left no written accounts of their lives or societies, and by the time Europeans arrived to chronicle the Mississippian peoples of North America, the greatest mound cities, for the most part, had been silent and dead for several centuries. Only De Soto and a few other abortive Spanish expeditions into the Southeast United States give any written accounts of

Mississippian life, and those are cursory at best, catching Mississippian polities in their twilight. These accounts are enlightening and fascinating, but are also riddled with ethnocentrism and dubious mercenary interpretations (Smith and Hally 1992).

Perhaps the most useful remnants left behind by Mississippian societies are the physical spaces that they inhabited, made clear by the construction of mounds. These mound sites, as well as sacred objects associated with the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex, have the greatest potential to illuminate the lives and social structures of Mississippian peoples. Ideological complexity, and the elite control of and management of that complexity, are reflected in the construction of earthen mounds and in the production and distribution of sacred, ceremonial objects. These physical manifestations of Mississippianism have the potential to reveal much about not only ceremonialism and religion in the societies that produced them, but also about the politics and polities from which they arose (Cobb 2003: 65-69; Blitz 2010: 5-6).

These general theories and categories concerning the Mississippian world provide the framework for understanding and interpreting individual sites or regions within that world. Next, our focus will draw downward, to the Mississippian occupations in the Falls of the Ohio River region and what Mississippian looked like in that particular area.

## CHAPTER 3

### FALLS MISSISSIPPIAN: PAST RESEARCH

The nature of Mississippian settlement in the Falls of the Ohio region of Indiana and Kentucky is one of the most pressing unanswered questions in the archaeology of the region. The Falls region is defined by the Falls of the Ohio River, a rapid formed by a massive outcrop of limestone. The Falls form the only natural block to navigation on the Ohio River, and as such have created a focal point for human settlement in both historic and prehistoric times. The region has been arbitrarily defined as encompassing a 161 km radius around the city of Louisville, KY (Bader 2003: 3). Of course, this designation has no true bearing on what should and should not be considered archaeologically related to the Mississippian sites that so far comprise the Falls Mississippian occupation. The region, at least from an archaeological standpoint, can only be defined by further archaeological research and survey which could provide a clearer view of cultural, material, and site structure similarities and variances within a regional framework.

The region is situated on the periphery of the Mississippian world, and has often been written off as a region that could have harbored significant Mississippian settlement. The landscape is not what has traditionally been defined as “ideal” Mississippian habitat

(Smith 1978: 483), but is composed of a constricted floodplain surrounded by upland areas. Despite this, Mississippian peoples did inhabit the area, locating their settlements along the narrow floodplain by the Ohio River as well as in the uplands around the Falls. The Prather site along with the site I examined for this thesis, 15SP202, are both situated in upland environments. The Mississippian sites in the Falls area are the last sites along the Ohio River that can be truly defined as Mississippian; to the north and east of the region Fort Ancient cultural groups dominate the landscape. This, along with the unusual geographic positions of many of the sites in the region, makes the nature of Mississippian occupations at the Falls exceedingly interesting, potentially providing insight into the nature of Mississippian cultural expansion and the interaction between the Mississippian world and its culturally distinct neighbors.

The Falls of the Ohio region is one of the most important areas for future Mississippian research. It is extremely important because it deviates in many ways from traditional Mississippian development. Most interestingly, as noted above, the Falls area acts a sort of frontier zone between the Mississippian cultures further west along the Ohio River and the Fort Ancient peoples to the east. In terms of material culture, Fort Ancient and Mississippian peoples were very similar. Both used shell-tempered pottery, made small, triangular projectile points, and lived sedentary lives in villages dependent on maize agriculture and wild game (Sharp 1996:161; Cook 2007: 440; Nass and Yerkes 1995: 60-61). The primary difference between the two seems to lie in the political organization of their societies. The large mound centers that characterize the largest Mississippian polities are entirely absent from Fort Ancient areas, suggesting that the elite ceremonialism inherent in the mound centers was not present in the same way

amongst Fort Ancient peoples. Fort Ancient village structures also suggest a more egalitarian societal structure, as they show very little evidence of one powerful elite or group of elites controlling the production of a given village (Sharp 1996:161; Nass and Yerkes 1995: 78-79). The Fort Ancient/ Mississippian interaction at the Falls will be discussed in greater detail below.

The interaction between these two groups in the Falls area makes research done here of great interest to archaeologists wishing to understand the nature of Mississippian society at its peripheries, as well as juxtaposing the defining characteristics of Mississippian society against the characteristics of a contemporary but non-Mississippian society.

Whether the Mississippian presence in the Falls region can be classified as truly Mississippian has been a contested issue for many years. Muller has categorized the Mississippian presence at the Falls as “backwoods Mississippian”, due to the scattered and insignificant nature of most of the sites in the region (Muller 1986: 250). Muller is also skeptical that the Mississippian sites in the Falls region represent colonization by the large Mississippian complexes further down the Ohio River, such as Angel and Kincaid. He postulates that the region may have been a “no-man’s land” between the Mississippian world to the south and west, and the Fort Ancient cultures to the north and east (Muller 1986: 249-250).

Since Muller published these conclusions, a significant amount of new work has been done in the Falls area which suggests a much more significant Mississippian presence than Muller estimated. To be fair, Muller does state that his conclusions may reflect a lack of adequate archaeological surveys in the region, a problem that has been

somewhat alleviated by recent excavations but which still plagues anyone wishing to understand the extent of Mississippian settlement in the region, a problem that this thesis attempts to help alleviate (Muller 1986: 250).

Historically, there have been reports indicating that there was a significant Mississippian presence at the Falls, in what is now Louisville, Kentucky. Several mounds were reported to have existed in the current downtown of Louisville. One was located at what is now Fifth and Main Streets, and the second at what is now Mohammed Ali Boulevard and Sixth Street. Due to its height, the mound at Fifth and Main was used in laying out the city and became Lot No. 1 in the initial surveys. The mound at Mohammed Ali and Sixth had a house built on it around 1810. Several other mounds were reported anecdotally to have existed around this mound, all near Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Streets. Graves were also reported to have been present in this area, and many artifacts were supposedly discovered. All these mounds were totally destroyed by 1926, and several had already been leveled by the early nineteenth century (Bader 2003: 9-12; Janzen 1972: 306-307). Mounds were built before the time of the Mississippians, so it is difficult to use their presence alone as a sure sign of Mississippian settlement. The accounts are also rather vague on the exact nature of the mounds in question.

In addition to these reported mounds, there were many historical reports of stone box graves in Louisville and across the Ohio River in Indiana. Stone box graves are commonly associated with Mississippian cemeteries. One grave, near Clarksville, Indiana, was reported to have yielded a hooded, owl effigy bottle, a very distinctive Mississippian form (Lilly 1937: 97-101; Bader 2003: 16-17).

Although these historical accounts are fairly speculative, the fact that mounds and stone box graves were discovered together points toward the possibility of a mound complex at the Falls, in what is now modern day downtown Louisville. Clearly, most of the evidence has long since been destroyed and to make any great leaps toward the certain existence of a mound complex would be ill advised. Nonetheless, the historic accounts described above do raise very interesting questions about the Mississippian presence in the Falls of the Ohio Region.

In addition to the documentary evidence, a considerable amount of archaeological work has been conducted in the past decade that has shed new light on the Mississippian occupation of the Falls of the Ohio region. Whereas alone the historic descriptions of graves and mounds are only intriguing, the professional archaeological work done in the area in the last ten years has bolstered the possibility that those descriptions may not be that far from the truth. The major archaeological studies done in the Falls Region in the past decade are summarized below (Figure 1).

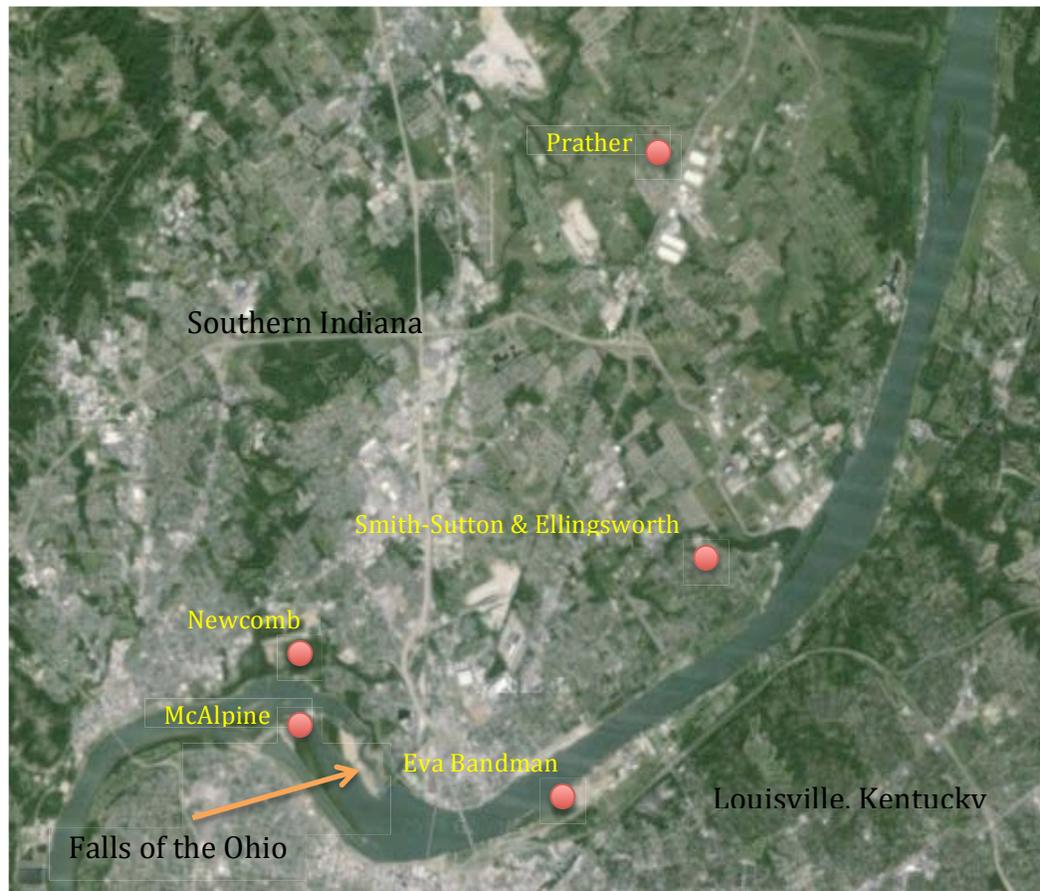


Figure 1. Falls of the Ohio Mississippian Sites

As well as the sites listed below, the Eva Bandman and Newcomb sites are also significant Mississippian sites excavated in the Falls region in the past ten years. Both of these sites have the potential to add greatly to our understanding of the Falls Mississippian occupation, but unfortunately the reports from both sites have not yet been released by the investigating agencies. At present, both sites are known to be significant villages, with Eva Bandman producing a large amount of decorated ceramics and showing evidence of substantial interaction with Fort Ancient peoples from the north and east of the Falls region (French et. al. 2010: 33-34). Both sites have produced radiocarbon dates, adding to the Mississippian regional chronology. The Newcomb site has been

dated to 1180-1290 A.D. although only one date is currently available. The Eva Bandman site has produced numerous dates, ranging from 1250-1700 A.D., which clearly indicates numerous occupations of the site area and is perhaps suggestive of some lack of tight sampling control (French et. al. 2010: 500-501). There is no doubt that the addition of information concerning these sites to the Falls area archaeological discourse will greatly expand our definition of the Falls Mississippian occupation.

## THE McALPINE SITE

Perhaps the most significant archaeological discovery pertaining to Mississippian settlement at the Falls in the past ten years is the McAlpine site (15JF702) excavation. This excavation was carried out by AMEC Earth and Environmental, a cultural resource management company, between 2002 and 2006. The site was discovered inadvertently during the expansion of the McAlpine Lock and Dam in Louisville, KY (French et al. 2010: iii; Keeney and Hemberger 2003: 65). Unfortunately, the site was discovered after a large borrow pit, covering an area of approximately 1200 sq m, was dug through the center of it during the initial phases of the lock and dam expansion. The site was also disturbed historically, as it lies directly beneath the nineteenth century town of Shippingport, which was abandoned and demolished in the mid-twentieth century (French et al. 2010: 57). All of these factors wrought a considerable amount of destruction on the Mississippian components of the site. Remarkably, and fortuitously for Falls region archaeology, a surprising amount of the Mississippian component was still intact and was excavated.

The excavations at McAlpine yielded the remains of a village. Nineteen likely Mississippian structures were uncovered, although all were not contemporaneous. These structures were deemed to be residential in nature, due to their construction and the features discovered within their footprints. In addition to these structures, seven human

burials were discovered, along with numerous exterior pit features (French et al. 2010: 70). In terms of artifacts, 6,629 pieces of Mississippian ceramics were discovered, along with 1,289 chipped or ground/pecked stone tools, 104 bone tools or objects, and significant amounts of faunal and botanical remains associated with subsistence activities (French et al. 2010:128, 236, 297, 351, 369). Radio carbon dates showed two distinct Mississippian phases at the site: an early component dating from A.D. 1010-1290 and a middle component dating from A.D. 1310-1400. Clearly, the Mississippian presence at the McAlpine site was a considerable one, and the excavation goes a long way toward dispelling the notion that the Mississippian occupation in the Falls region was sparse or short lived.

## THE PRATHER SITE

The only definitively classified Mississippian mound site in the Falls of the Ohio region is the Prather site (12CL4), located near Charlestown in Clark County, Indiana. In 2003, Cheryl Munson and Robert McCullough with Indiana University and the Indiana University-Purdue University Archaeological Survey conducted a general survey of the site. Known historically, the site had been excavated partially by E.Y. Guernsey in 1934 and Donald Janzen in 1971, but had not been explored since (Munson and McCullough 2004: 3, 16). Using augur sampling, the archaeologists established that the Mississippian component of the site covered 5.2 ha. Four mounds were discovered during the survey, confirming historical and anecdotal claims that the site was a mound complex (Munson and McCullough 2004: iii). During Janzen's excavation in 1971, one carbon date returned a calibrated date range of between A.D. 998-1217 and later dates procured by Munson and McCullough have a range from 1000-1270 A.D. (Munson and McCullough 2004: 16; French et. al. 2010: 500).

In addition to the confirmation of mounds at Prather, a large number of artifacts were recovered. The vast majority of ceramics recovered from the survey were from the Mississippi Period, totaling 3,296 sherds. Significant amounts of chipped stone were also recovered, totaling 2,492 pieces. All but one of the 19 projectile points recovered were of the Madison type, the prevalent point type of the Mississippi Period (Munson and

McCullough 2004: 44, 45, 55). In addition to the discovery of these large concentrations of artifacts, the survey was able to establish the existence of both a plaza, around which the mounds clustered, and a possible palisade (Munson and McCullough 2004: 80-81).

Though no large-scale excavations were conducted at Prather as part of this investigation, the results of the survey point towards a significant Mississippian occupation. The construction of a mound complex as well as a palisade indicates that the site was occupied in a permanent fashion, and should be classified as a town.

## THE SMITH-SUTTON AND ELLINGSWORTH SITES

The Smith-Sutton (12CL130) and Ellingsworth (12CL127) sites both appear to be Mississippian villages located in Clarke County, Indiana. Both sites were located and investigated between 2007 and 2010 by archaeologists with the Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne Archaeological Survey. The Smith-Sutton site appears to have been a large Mississippian village without a mound, although there is the possibility that a mound was present and has been destroyed. The village appears to be 1.2 ha in size, and was largely identified through geophysical survey (Arnold et al. 2012: 17). Thirty-three possible structures have been identified, apparently surrounding a central plaza, and a possible palisade was also discovered (Arnold et al. 2012: 18-22). The Ellingsworth site is located near the Smith-Sutton site, to the southwest, and appears to be a smaller village, without a mound or palisade. Geophysical survey and shovel testing revealed a 30 m wide plaza surrounded by several houses (Arnold et al. 2012: 22). In addition to these two main habitation areas, six additional small sites were identified in outlying areas surrounding the villages (Arnold et al. 2012: 24). Limited excavations at both Smith-Sutton and Ellingsworth revealed wall trench construction and shell-tempered pottery was recovered at both sites, leading to the designation of these villages as Mississippian. Radiocarbon dates were also procured for both sites, returning dates in the late 14<sup>th</sup> to early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., indicating that the sites are possibly contemporary

with one another and with several of the other major Mississippian sites in the Falls of the Ohio region (Arnold et al. 2012: 29).

The surveys at the Smith-Sutton and Ellingsworth sites add to the growing body of evidence that the Mississippian presence at the Falls of the Ohio was not of the scattered, low-density model espoused by Muller, but was a significant and permanent settlement or collection of settlements. Added to the discoveries made at McAlpine and Prather, as well as some historical evidence for a mound complex in downtown Louisville, it seems safe to assume that there was a fairly significant and permanent Mississippian presence at the Falls of the Ohio River.

## CHAPTER 4

### SITE 15SP202

In addition to the McAlpine, Prather, Smith-Sutton, and Ellingsworth sites, several smaller Mississippian sites have been identified within the Falls of the Ohio region. One such site is 15SP202, located in Spencer County, KY. The site is situated near the town of Waterford, along Plum Creek, a tributary stream of the Salt River (Figure 2). It was excavated in the late 1970s by Dr. Donald Janzen, then a professor of archaeology at Centre College in Danville, KY. The site was investigated and excavations were carried out as part of a field school for Centre College archaeology students. All of the ceramics from site 15SP202 discussed in this section are fully described and illustrated in Chapter 5 below.

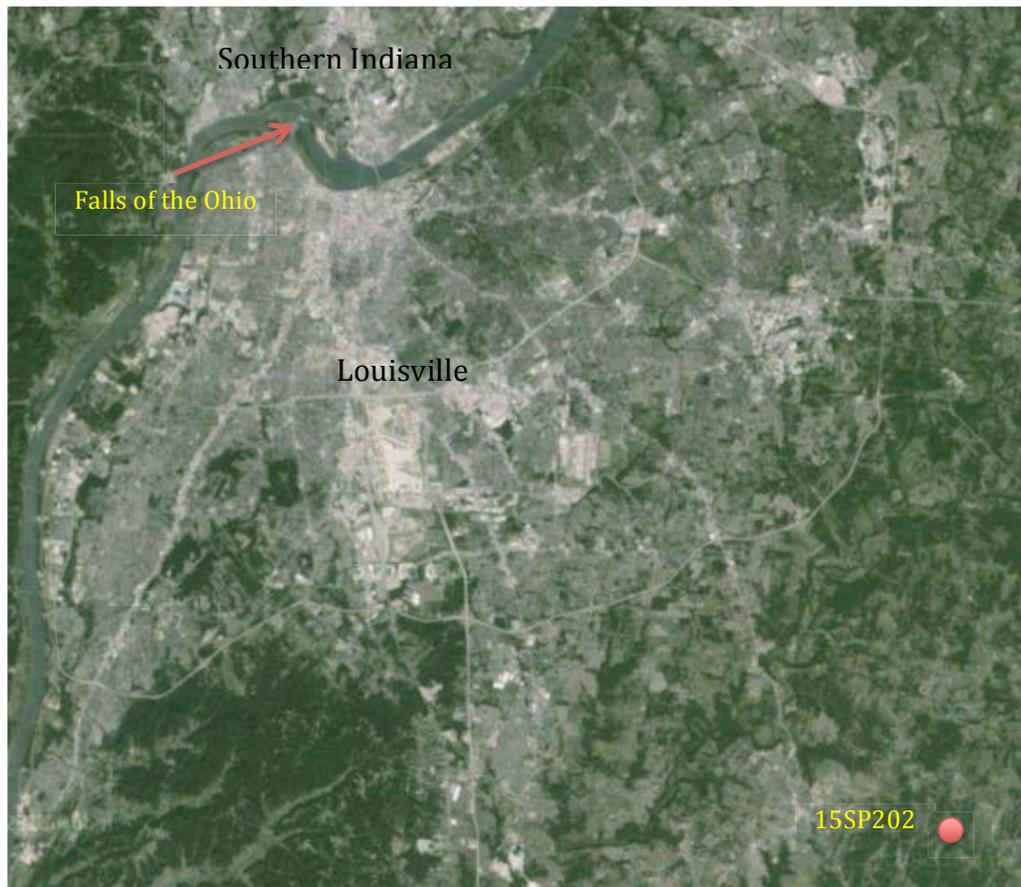


Figure 2. Approximate Location of 15SP202

It would seem best to begin by exploring the usefulness of looking at a site such as 15SP202. 15SP202 has no large mounds, or any mounds at all for that matter, as far as is known. It does not appear to be a village and does not seem to approach the size or complexity of the Mississippian village at the McAlpine site. Nevertheless, small Mississippian sites can provide the archaeologist with very useful information, and the examination of such sites fleshes out and fills in the picture of Mississippian settlement in a given area or region.

Much productive and informative work has been done with small Mississippian sites in recent years. Hammerstedt looked back at data and artifacts

collected from the Annis Mound site by WPA excavations in the 1930s in an attempt to define the nature of social differentiation between elites and non-elites at smaller sites. His work showed that elites at smaller sites, though possessing special status, did not exert a significant amount of economic control, at least when it comes to the presence of “fancy” items (i.e. trade goods, decorated pottery, SECC items, etc.). The author points out that looking only at larger mound sites when attempting to understand Mississippian societal stratification can skew results toward more formalized and drastic boundaries between elites and non-elites than perhaps existed at all localities (Hammerstedt 2005: 11, 19-22).

Cobb and Butler examined two smaller Mississippian village sites in the uplands of southern Illinois. Their work on these smaller sites has led to some very interesting ideas about the nature of Mississippian migration and the ways in which it is reflected in new and changing ideologies. The authors’ work also sheds light on the collapse of the large mound centers in the Lower Ohio River Valley that led to much of this migration, and the ways that the social upheaval created by the collapses led to new interpretations of Mississippian ideology by displaced Mississippians (Cobb and Butler 2006: 328-329, 334-343).

Clay has also stressed the importance of smaller sites in understanding the overall Mississippian settlement system. Clay emphasizes the need to reassess smaller sites in their own right, rather than simply viewing them as smaller expressions of the cultural and political movements of the major mound centers. Specifically, he focuses on two small village sites in Hopkins County, Kentucky. The work done at these sites has allowed specific chronologies to be established for each site, allowing more localized and

detailed interpretations of politics, population movements, and elite presence. The author goes on to emphasize the utility of understanding small sites in interpreting larger ones, using the specific and more easily controlled data from smaller excavations to cast light on the daunting chronologies of large mound complexes. In the end, Clay points out that small sites can tell archaeologists much about Mississippian society, and should not simply be seen as smaller expressions of the collective will of large centers (Clay 2006: 48-49, 60, 62).

Clearly, much work has been done recently on smaller Mississippian sites, and much can be learned about Mississippian peoples from studying these small sites. Consequently, site 15SP202 can shed light on the nature of the Mississippian occupation at the Falls of the Ohio, despite the fact that it is not a large village like the McAlpine site or a mound center like the Prather site.

In order to place site 15SP202 into a regional framework, it is necessary to first classify it in a way that has meaning for the wider archaeological community. Green and Munson, in Smith's landmark *Mississippian Settlement Patterns*, lay out a system for classifying Mississippian sites based on associated attributes and overall site area. The authors focused their research on the Angel and Caborn-Welborn Phase Mississippian groups of southwestern Indiana, the closest large Mississippian mound complex region to the Falls of the Ohio. Due to its geographic proximity, it would seem to be appropriate to use their site categories to talk about Mississippian sites in the Falls region. Green and Munson established six categories of Mississippian sites that, from largest to smallest, are classified as towns, large villages, small villages, hamlets, farmsteads, and camps (Green and Munson 1978: 310).

It does not follow, however, that the Falls of the Ohio Mississippian occupation and those at Angel are necessarily the same, or that the Falls of the Ohio occupation is simply an off-shoot of Angel Mississippian. From the evidence presented in this paper and the archaeological record in general, it appears more and more that the Falls of the Ohio Mississippian occupation was unique in many ways, and can be seen as constituting a full-fledged Mississippian occupation in its own right, not simply an Angel polity frontier post.

Despite the continued use of Smith's classificatory system, his theoretical approach to understanding Mississippian polities has fallen under scrutiny and criticism, especially in the last several decades. Smith's system is one that relies heavily on the idea of environmentally circumscribed factors in the development of Mississippian polities (Muller 1986: 172). As outlined by Smith, Mississippian society was largely confined to floodplain environments where large amounts of corn could be cultivated, the soil was continually replenished by alluvial flood deposition, and fish and migratory waterfowl could be harvested in large quantities (Smith 1978: 483). His models of Mississippian settlement are heavily weighted toward causal environmental factors, to the point of becoming deterministic.

Unfortunately, there is very little information regarding the nature of site 15SP202. The notes from Janzen's excavation were lost in the early 1980s and there is limited context information included with the artifacts. Due to this difficulty, it would be fairly conjectural to classify 15SP202 according to Green and Munson's site class structure. However, some conclusions concerning the nature of the site can be drawn from the artifacts themselves. The artifacts were recovered from the surface and from one

test unit. That being the case, the amount of ceramics recovered points toward a fairly dense artifact concentration. Most likely it can be assumed that 15SP202 was probably more than a camp, due both to the density of artifacts and the amount of buried ceramics, suggestive of a possible midden. Based on the density of ceramics and the decorated sherds in the collection, it would seem reasonable to designate site 15SP202 a homestead or, possibly, a hamlet. The characteristics and processes governing ceramic assemblages at smaller sites are often hard to understand, and the lack of provenience data and site information for 15SP202 adds another layer of confusion (Pauketat 1989: 290-293). Despite this, the ceramic assemblage is large enough to allow classification as a homestead, even without much solid site data.

Gary Shapiro's work in the Oconee River drainage of north central Georgia can also help establish what sort of site 15SP202 may have been. Shapiro set out to see if the size of vessels at a group of sites could be correlated to site size and permanence. The sites used in this study are very similar to site 15SP202 in their location on the landscape and their size. Like 15SP202, the sites are located along a small river drainage in a constricted floodplain, with only one site classifiable as a village. The other three sites are relatively small, from 1600 to 160 to only 30 sq. m.. Shapiro then examined the vessel types and sizes for each site, in order to establish whether site size would reflect vessel size. The sizes of vessels correlated to the sizes of the sites, although the differences between vessel size at the small sites was negligible compared to the differences between those sites and the larger village site. Ultimately, Shapiro concludes that the presence of jars, interpreted as storage vessels and indicative of greater site permanence, could more

accurately be used to gauge site type than could size alone (Shapiro 1984: 696-697; 704-706).

In terms of 15SP202, Shapiro's study strengthens the contention that the site was a small homestead, due to the presence of several measurable large jar rim sherds, as well as many additional rim fragments indicative of a significant number of jars at the site. All of these factors point towards some site permanence at 15SP202, and away from interpretations of the site as a transient camp.

What, then, is the significance of site 15SP202? What can this small, poorly provenienced site tell us about the Mississippian occupation in the Falls of the Ohio River region? First, it tells us that there were small settlements dispersed across the region, and that the Mississippian occupation was not constricted to a small region immediately surrounding the Falls, or only near the Ohio River. Typically, as elucidated in Smith's settlement system (1978: 483), Mississippian peoples would chose to locate their settlements on more prime, agriculturally productive areas along the major rivers. In the case of the Falls Region this is of course along the Ohio itself. As discussed above, the McAlpine, Prather, Smith-Sutton, and Ellingsworth sites are all located near the Ohio River. It would be safe to postulate that small Mississippian sites, such as 15SP202, located in the uplands surrounding the Ohio River at the Falls, would have been associated with and/or post-date the formation of the sites along the river, a contention that is born out in the Falls chronology discussed below. It seems likely that the Mississippian presence at the Falls began along the Ohio River and then spread into the surrounding uplands, based on the premise that Mississippian peoples moving into the area, or local peoples adopting Mississippian lifeways, would gravitate first toward the

easily exploitable and resource rich environments near the river that Mississippian peoples across the Midwest and Southeast seemed to prefer for their larger settlements. This theory is partly born out by the fact that the earliest known dates for Mississippian sites in the Falls Region have been reported from the Prather and McAlpine sites, both of which are located near the Ohio River (Munson and McCullough 2004: 52; French et al. 2010: 56).

Flowing from this proposed model of Mississippian settlement at the Falls, it would follow that as the sites along the Ohio River became more established, their occupants would begin to spread out into the smaller drainages and uplands surrounding the river valley. The establishment of small, outlying hamlets and farmsteads like 15SP202 can be seen as evidence of expanded settlement and control of the Falls of the Ohio Region by Mississippian peoples, or at least the adoption of their lifeways by local peoples in the region. Either way, it shows that the Mississippian presence at the Falls was secure enough to expand, and did not feel the need to hunker down in its larger settlements near the Ohio River, perhaps reflecting, in a lesser way, Pauketat's premise that large mound or town centers produce peaceful hinterlands through the maintenance of order (Pauketat 2007: 155-156).

Demonstrating, as 15SP202 does, that Mississippian peoples were settling more widely across the landscape points toward a substantial Mississippian presence at the Falls, and steers interpretation away from the premise that Falls Mississippian was a small, intrusive and short lived settlement experiment, or simply an approximation of Mississippian lifestyles by some of the Falls area locals that failed to be truly Mississippian.

This does not mean that Mississippian peoples and lifeways at the Falls of the Ohio did not have possible connections with or origins in the larger mound centers further down the Ohio River. There is evidence of Angel Negative Painted pottery at the McAlpine site (French et al. 2010: 146), and it can be assumed that the Mississippian presence at the Falls did not suddenly erupt fully formed from the head of previous Falls region societies. What sites like 15SP202 show is that the Mississippian occupation at the Falls became a substantial occupation and, as such, began to spread across the region. Following from this conclusion, and supported by the nature of the Mississippian ceramics recovered from sites in the Falls Region, it is possible to begin building a synthesis of Falls Mississippian as its own, unique representation of Mississippian culture.

Site 15SP202 bolsters this proposition in some part due to the nature of its ceramics. The study of Mississippian ceramics in the Falls region is a nascent science, and is plagued by the geography of the region. The chief difficulty in analyzing ceramics recovered from the Falls region arises from the presence of Fort Ancient peoples in the area. Of course, this is also what makes the region so interesting for archaeologists studying Mississippians. The Falls area forms the frontier between what have traditionally been considered the Mississippian and Fort Ancient cultural spheres. Although there is considerable difference visible between Fort Ancient and Mississippian sites, in the Falls region those differences are very much blurred.

The difficulty arises when attempts are made to identify sites in the Falls region as Fort Ancient or Mississippian based mainly on their ceramic assemblages. In many ways, the ceramics of Fort Ancient and Mississippian peoples are very similar. Early in the Fort

Ancient chronology, the majority of their ceramics were tempered with limestone; as time progressed, shell was mixed in in greater and greater proportions, until by 1400 A.D. shell became the almost exclusive tempering agent (Pollack et al. 2008: 240). Following from this, it becomes very difficult to differentiate Mississippian pottery from Fort Ancient pottery, since both societies used shell as their primary tempering agent. In regions where the two societies overlap, such as the Falls of the Ohio, ceramic temper alone becomes a very weak indicator of site affiliation.

Of course, in many situations there are numerous other ways to identify site affiliation outside the presence and nature of ceramics. House type and village structure are the surest ways for archaeological investigators to differentiate between Fort Ancient and Mississippian sites, and these indicators have been used by researchers in Ohio to show Fort Ancient/Mississippian interaction at certain villages there (Cook and Fargher 2008; Cook and Fargher 2007; Cook 2007).

Within the Falls of the Ohio Region, these site structure indicators have been used to establish very solid societal affiliations for many of the late prehistoric sites investigated in the area, as discussed above. In addition to establishing these sites as Mississippian, the nature of the preservation and excavation of these sites has allowed researchers to demonstrate significant interaction between Fort Ancient and Mississippian peoples in the Falls region, primarily through the presence of Fort Ancient style pottery (French et. al. 2010: 524-527).

In terms of site 15SP202, there is not enough information to make any kinds of sure statements about the nature of the site structure. As postulated above, the amounts and types of artifacts recovered can allow some speculation as to the nature of the site,

but lacking any larger scale excavation it becomes very hard to definitively group site 15SP202 in either the Fort Ancient or Mississippian camps based on site structure indicators, which are non-existent for the site at this point. Does this mean that nothing can be said in terms of whether or not 15SP202 is a Mississippian or Fort Ancient site? Leaving aside the obvious difficulties of painting such a pure site dichotomy for the moment, the proposed question can be answered: No, it is not impossible to say anything more about 15SP202. In this case, the decorations on the ceramics recovered from 15SP202 can allow further commentary on the nature and affiliation of the site.

As discussed in detail below, three decorated sherds were recovered from site 15SP202. These sherds can help define further the nature of the site, and allow some commentary on the nature of Mississippian decorated ceramics in the Falls region. Although some of the decorated sherds from 15SP202 bore some similarities to established Mississippian decorative styles, none of them could be grouped definitively into a particular Mississippian type. This is in part due to the small size of the sherds in question, but also to the decorative elements themselves. In addition to this ambiguity, there is the distinct possibility that the decorative elements on the sherds, especially Decorated Sherds 1 and 3, represent a Fort Ancient aesthetic influence. The chevron pattern on Decorated Sherd 1 is reminiscent of patterns found on decorated ceramics recovered from well-defined Fort Ancient sites. The trailed line on Decorated Sherd 3 can be correlated to the curvilinear and rectilinear guilloche patterning that is commonly found on decorated Fort Ancient vessels (Turnbow and Henderson 1992: 345).

At first glance, this would seem only to further stymie attempts to make any kind of statement about the nature of site 15SP202. This would be a correct assumption, if the

site were not in the Falls region. The difficulty in designating 15SP202 as either Fort Ancient or Mississippian is a common problem with many sites in the region, but a problem that further underscores a growing realization about late prehistory at the Falls of the Ohio River. That realization is that the dichotomy drawn between Mississippian and Fort Ancient peoples begins to break down in the Falls region, and that to attempt to talk about late prehistoric sites in the region as either Mississippian or Fort Ancient obscures the fact that they are often both at the same time. This contention is supported by archaeological reassessments of cross-cultural interactions in frontier zones that stress a sort of “creolization” or melding of different cultures rather than a colonialist core-periphery model of frontier cultural interaction. Cultures in interaction affect the development of one another, and do not simply exist as static and independent entities acting upon each other across a clearly demarcated border (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 471-474; Trigger 1989: 330-337).

At other points along the periphery of the Mississippian world this sort of cross-cultural interaction has taken place. The Aztalan mound complex in southern Wisconsin is another such area where Mississippian groups have interacted with non-Mississippian groups. In the case of Aztalan, the archaeological evidence supports a much more direct interaction between a group of Mississippians, most likely hailing from Cahokia, and the local peoples of the site area. Many Cahokia style artifacts, such as Ramey Incised pottery and tri-notched projectile points, have been discovered at the site. There are also clear similarities in site plan and architecture between the Aztalan site and Mississippian sites further south. Of course, ceramics and points can be traded without direct contact and site plans can be emulated.

In response to these ambiguities, a study was conducted that showed that strontium isotope levels in skeletons excavated at the Aztalan site indicate that several of the individuals exhumed did not originate from the Aztalan region, and that a few of these individuals also had strontium levels similar to ones found in skeletons from Cahokia (Price, Burton, and Stoltman 2007: 525-527, 535-536). It seems relatively safe to assume that the people who built Aztalan were on the frontier of the Mississippian sphere, engaged in a cross-cultural interaction with the non-Mississippian local people in the region. In addition to Aztalan, several other sites have been investigated that appear to be Mississippian/Cahokian in origin, such as the Trempealeau site in Wisconsin (Green and Rodell 1994: 337-359).

The Aztalan and Trempealeau sites are excellent examples of the potential that Falls region archaeology can have in further defining the nature of interactions at the peripheries of the Mississippian world. Unfortunately, the development of Louisville and Southern Indiana has already destroyed much of the archaeological record in the area, unlike at Aztalan, which is located in an agricultural area and has been well preserved. Despite this, there is still quite a lot of potential in the Falls area for new discoveries to be made that could have a significant impact on Mississippian cross-cultural interactions.

## CHAPTER 5

### 15SP202 POTTERY ANALYSIS

During the investigation carried out by Janzen mentioned above a number of artifacts were collected, both from the surface as well as from the excavations. Animal bone, chert debitage, celt fragments, projectile points, drills, biface fragments, and ceramics were all recovered from the site. Initially, the artifacts were housed at Centre College, but in the intervening years they have been moved to the Kentucky Science Center, and then on to the University of Louisville, where they are now situated. Unfortunately, the notes and site maps that correspond to this site were lost somewhere during its several migrations, making interpretation of the artifacts as part of the site somewhat difficult. Despite this, the artifacts themselves can reveal meaningful insights into the nature of the site and the people that inhabited it.

Although an initial analysis of the artifacts was carried out, the site has never been interpreted as a component of the wider Mississippian presence in the region, or in light of the more recent Mississippian archaeology carried out at the Falls. In order to more fully understand the nature of the Mississippian presence at the Falls, the totality of known Mississippian sites must be incorporated into a broader picture of what Mississippian settlement looked like in the region. A closer look at site 15SP202 will help further attempts to flesh out the Mississippian occupation of the Falls region.

To begin at the beginning, it is necessary to first ask whether site 15SP202 is actually from the Mississippi Period from a ceramic standpoint. First and foremost, the ceramics from site 15SP202 situate the site within the Mississippi Period because they are all shell-tempered. Both coarse and fine shell temper are exhibited amongst the sherds, and in general they can be sorted between the Mississippi Plain and Bell Plain types, although a minority of the sherds are cordmarked. As discussed above, shell-tempering is one of the most commonly used hallmarks for designating a site as Mississippian, especially when, as in this case, very little is known about the nature of the site outside of the collected artifacts. Also discussed above, the presence of Mississippi Plain and Bell Plain ceramics tells us little about the specific location of the site within Mississippian chronology or its relationship to other parts of the Mississippian world. As was discussed above, some doubt remains as to whether the site can definitively be called Mississippian due to its geographic location near Fort Ancient cultures to the north and east, where pottery was also often shell tempered.

In addition to the shell-tempered ceramics, the presence of small, triangular projectile points also indicates that site 15SP202 is Mississippian in origin, or at the least late prehistoric.

In the summer of 2013, the author began to reevaluate the artifact collection from site 15SP202, which is now housed at the University of Louisville in Louisville, KY as mentioned above. The entire collection of artifacts was reviewed, and it was determined that the most productive course of research would be to analyze the ceramic sample in particular, as late prehistoric sites in the region in question are largely delineated and defined by the nature of their ceramic assemblages. The efficacy of looking at ceramic

assemblages as a way for archaeologists to understand past cultures and people has long been a part of the discipline. Once pottery is adopted by a culture, its presence at archaeological sites becomes ubiquitous, making it easily accessible and present for study. Its decorative motifs and construction are informed by the societies that produce it, and as such provide a window into the nature of those societies (Rice 1987: 24-26). In an attempt to add to the regional knowledge of ceramics at the Falls, I have chosen to analyze the ceramics from site 15SP202 using the type-variety system formulated by Phillips as part of his survey of the Mississippi Valley (Phillips 1971). The type-variety system as a whole relies on the establishment of an initial identifier, usually based on where the ceramic type was first located geographically, followed by a variety that refers to some specific surface treatment of the ceramic in question, such as polishing, incising, stamping, etc. (Sinopoli 1991: 52-53).

In the analysis that follows, I have described the decorated sherds from the collection as well as the larger rimsherds and handles. I have measured and described the decorative elements, surface colors, and orifice diameters (where the rim fragments were large enough to do so) of the selected sherds in order to integrate the ceramics from site 15SP202 into a wider Falls region ceramic framework, as well as to attempt to integrate the 15SP202 ceramics into the overall type-variety categories still used to interpret Mississippian ceramics. The detail of the descriptions may seem arduous, but I have included them in order to allow for other researchers to use this analysis as a comparative source for other Mississippian ceramics studies.

The sample consists mainly of body sherds, although there are a significant number of rim and decorated sherds in comparison to the overall size of the collection. It

was determined by the author that the most productive course of action would be to focus research efforts on the decorated rimsherds, although several of the larger rimsherds were also analyzed in detail. The dimensions of the rimsherds, as well as the dimensions of their decorative elements, were measured using digital calipers.

In total, 857 pieces of ceramics were recovered. The surface collection of the site yielded 445 sherds, while the excavations yielded 412 sherds. Of these, the vast majority are undecorated body sherds; 395 from the surface collection were body sherds and 377 from the excavations. This heavy weighting towards undecorated, plain sherds fits in well with ceramic assemblages across the Mississippian world (Muller 1986: 235; Hilgeman 2000: 25; Teltser 1993: 530-531; Pauketat 1987: 4-6). Despite the predominance of undecorated body sherds, the site did yield some rim and decorated sherds. The surface collection of the site yielded 50 rim sherds, 5 of which are decorated. The excavations yielded 35 rim sherds, 2 of which are decorated.

Of the 5 decorated rim sherds recovered from the surface collection, 3 are decorated only with fingernail lip notching. One is only a very small fragment of lip, with no rim or body surface. This fragment is tan in color. The other fingernail notched fragment has some portion of the rim/body and is cordmarked to the lip. The cordmarked fragment has an unsmoothed, lumpy edge along the lip/rim juncture, presumably caused by the pressure of the notching and the lack of any smoothing along this juncture after notching. This decoration looks much like the edge of a piecrust. The exterior surface of this sherd is tan, grading into darker brown and gray near and onto the lip. An additional lip fragment has diagonal dowel impressions across the top of the lip, but the rim/body is plain. This sherd is light brown to gray.

The two remaining rim fragments from the surface exhibit more decoration than simple rim notching. One fragment has two lines directly below the lip. The fragment measures 5.36 mm thick at the lip, 4.28 mm at the neck, expanding to 5.6 mm thick at the former juncture with the body of the vessel. The lines below the lip are trailed and relatively wide and shallow. Striations are visible along the troughs of the trailed lines. The lines form a chevron pattern, one small triangle nested within another triangle. The points of the triangles point downwards, away from the vessel lip. From the lip to the bottom point of the top chevron measures 12.2 mm, and from the lip to the bottom point of the lower chevron measures 22.9 mm. The top chevron line measures 2.66 mm wide, with the bottom chevron measuring 2.55 mm wide. This fragment also has a drilled hole that pierces completely through the body of the vessel. The hole was drilled through the bottom chevron line. The hole measures 4.22 mm in diameter on the exterior of the sherd and 5.27 mm on the interior. The fragment also has diagonal dowel impressions along the top of the lip. The exterior surface of this sherd is gray to brown, while the interior is gray to black. It will be referred to as Decorated Sherd 1 in this analysis (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Decorated Sherd 1

The other of the two decorated rim fragments from the surface collection is unique amongst the ceramics collected at site 15SP202. It has a series of thumb size impressions running slightly below and parallel to the lip along the rim. Below these impressions a large dowel was impressed into or drug across the clay, creating a groove that runs parallel to the rim. The dowel was not totally smooth, and left striations running along the groove, parallel to the vessel lip. This sherd measures 8.27 mm thick at the lip, 7.64 mm thick at the thumb impressions, 7.79 mm thick at the trough of the dowel mark, and 7.41 mm thick below the dowel mark where the sherd would have joined the body of the vessel. The thumb impressions begin at 4.2 mm below the lip, while the dowel mark begins at 22.04 mm below the lip and extends to 35.15 mm. There is a ridge between the thumb impressions and the dowel impression that measures 10.47 mm wide, with the thumb impressions intruding into the upper part of this ridge. The sherd's exterior surface

is light brown to tan in color, while the interior is dark gray to black. It will be referred to as Decorated Sherd 2 for the remainder of this analysis (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Decorated Sherd 2

Amongst the excavated portion of the ceramics from site 15SP202, there is only one truly decorated sherd, although one other sherd does have lip notching. The decorated sherd is broken into two pieces, but they clearly fit together and appear to have been glued together at some point during the initial curation process. For this analysis, this sherd will be treated as a single entity. This sherd is perhaps the most interesting piece of pottery recovered from site 15SP202. The decoration consists of a wavy, trailed line running along the rim of the vessel. It begins as a curvilinear form, but transitions into a rectilinear form as it progresses along the rim. The line is relatively wide and shallow and there are very clear striations running along the trough of the line, created by the dowel or stylus that was used to create the decoration. The line ranges from 1.76 mm

to 2.78 mm wide along its course. The line ranges from 3.77 mm to 8.57 mm from the lip along its peaks. The height of the trailed line measures from 23.8 mm to 26.32 mm along its peaks and troughs, although the lower portion of the decoration was somewhat obscured due to the broken lower edge of the sherd. The interior surface is a light brown/tan to darker gray brown in color. The exterior surface is black with some lighter brown patches. This rimsherd was large enough to allow an estimate to be made concerning rim diameter. Though small, this sherd's rim angle was severe enough to indicate a fairly small opening. The diameter measured 11.5 cm, indicating that this sherd was probably part of a small bowl or jar. It could also be a bottle rim fragment (Hilgeman 2000: 62,76, 109). It will be referred to as Decorated Sherd 3 for the remainder of this analysis (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Decorated Sherd 3

As mentioned above, an additional sherd from the excavated ceramics has a notched lip.

In addition to these decorated rim fragments, two additional plain rim fragments deserve attention. These rims will be referred to as Plain Rim 1 and Plain Rim 2.

Plain Rim 1 has a flared rim with a rounded neck angle. The rim measures 8.18 to 9.58 mm in thickness and the neck measures 6.75 to 6.94 mm in thickness. Plain Rim 1 measures 21.64 to 25.88 mm from lip to neck along the rim. The interior surface of this fragment ranges from black to reddish brown to light brown in color, while the exterior surface is gray brown to reddish brown (Figure 6). This rim fragment was large enough to determine an orifice diameter. The orifice diameter would have measured 31 cm indicating that Plain Rim 1 was most likely part of a large bowl or jar (Hilgeman 2000: 76, 109).



Figure 6. Plain Rim 1

Plain Rim 2 also has a flared rim, but has a more angular neck junction with the body. It is broken into two pieces which easily fit back together, one of which was

recovered from the surface and one of which was recovered from the excavation. The rim measures 7.67 to 9.34 mm in thickness and the neck measures 8.88 to 11.19 mm in thickness. The rim measures 20.05 to 20.82 mm in width from lip to neck. The exterior surface color of Plain Rim 2 is reddish to light brown with gray/black patches. The interior surface color is light brown with dark brown and gray/black patches (Figure 7). Plain Rim 2 was also large enough to allow a diameter measurement to be made. This orifice diameter would have measured 27 cm in diameter, indicating that, like Plain Rim 1, this rim fragment most likely belonged to a large bowl or jar (Hilgeman 2000: 76, 109).



Figure 7. Plain Rim 2

Two loop handles were recovered from site 15SP202 as well. One came from the surface collection, while the other came from the excavations. The handle collected from the surface is plain. This handle is 26.79 mm wide and 14.97 mm thick at the top where it

would have joined the rim. At the base, this handle is 18.57 mm wide and 16.24 mm thick. It is 22.45 mm wide at its middle. The color is patchy and ranges from light brown to gray/ black. This handle will be referred to as Handle 1 for the remainder of this analysis (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Handle 1

The handle recovered from the excavation has two nodes at the top, where the handle connects to the vessel rim. One of these nodes is complete, while the second node is indicated by the presence of a clear break scar. This handle is broken along one side and the interior surface is pretty badly damaged as well, making accurate measurements impossible. The intact side could only be accurately measured along a small area of intact surface running from the middle of the handle to the base where it would have attached to the body of the vessel. At these points it measured 12.1 mm thick at the middle and 9.48 mm thick at the base. The color of the handle is light brown to tan. The nodes could be

the ears of an animal effigy, but there is too much damage to be able to determine anything for sure. For the purposes of further analysis, it will be assumed that the handle is noded and not an effigy. For the remainder of this analysis, this handle will be referred to as Handle 2 (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Handle 2

All of the decorated sherds, rims and handles above are shell-tempered and can be divided between the Mississippi Plain and Bell Plain paste types. As emphasized by Phillips, the Mississippi and Bell Plain classes are often times very difficult to distinguish from each other (Phillips 1970: 58, 130). For the purposes of the present analysis, it was decided that sherds containing shell particles greater than 2 mm in length would be classified as Bell Plain, while those with particles greater than 2 mm in length would be classified as Mississippi Plain. Both Bell and Mississippi Plain contain very fine particles

of shell powder, so classification hinges on examination of measurable pieces of shell temper (as per Teltser 1993: 533).

Decorated Sherds 1 and 3, as well as Handle 2 can be classified as having Bell Plain temper. Decorated Sherd 1 has shell particles ranging from 1.34 to .55 mm in length. Decorated Sherd 3 has measurable particles ranging from 2.48 to .71 mm in length. Despite having a few particles larger than 2 mm, the shell in Decorated Sherd 3 was very fine overall and the larger particles were very close to 2mm, so it seemed reasonable to classify it as Bell. In addition to these sherds, Handle 2 could be classified as Bell Plain. It contains particles ranging from 1.23 to 1.08 mm in length. However, Handle 2 is in very poor condition, with much of its surface broken and degraded, making analytical statements about its temper somewhat speculative.

Decorated Sherd 2, Plain Rims 1 and 2, and Handle 1 can all be classified as Mississippi Plain temper. Decorated Sherd 2 has measurable shell particles ranging from 4.45 to 2.72 mm in length. Plain Rim 1 has measurable particles from 5.18 to 1.8 mm in length, while Plain Rim 2 has particles from 4.12 to 3.69 mm in length. Handle 1 has shell particles ranging from 3.54 to 2.24 mm in length.

A discussion of the significance of the pottery from site 15SP202 will commence in the section below.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON OF RESULTS

The ceramic assemblage from site 15SP202 compares favorably to other Mississippian ceramic assemblages recovered in the Falls of the Ohio region. As mentioned above, the McAlpine site, 15JF702, is perhaps the most completely excavated Mississippian site in the Falls area. It also yielded a large collection of ceramic artifacts. In total, 6,629 pieces of Mississippian ceramics were recovered. The majority of the recovered ceramics from McAlpine came from a Middle Mississippian occupation, dated by the investigators to A.D. 1325-1425. A smaller amount of ceramics came from an earlier Mississippian, circa A.D. 1100, occupation, contemporaneous with the generally accepted dates for the Prather Site in southern Indiana mentioned above and to be discussed in greater detail below (French et al. 2010: 127-128; 134).

Not surprisingly, the majority of ceramics recovered from the site were of the Mississippi Plain or Bell Plain paste types, with the Early Mississippian pastes exhibiting some shell/grog, shell/grit tempers (French et al. 2010: 131). The ceramics from 15SP202 are also Mississippi and Bell Plain, which is to be expected from a Mississippian assemblage, as mentioned above in the discussion of Mississippian ceramic assemblages. Unlike McAlpine, all the ceramics from 15SP202 are shell-tempered.

Stylistically, the ceramic assemblage from site 15SP202 is difficult to describe. Decorated Sherds 1 and 3 could be said to resemble both the O'Byam Incised and the Matthews Incised vars. Matthews and Beckwith types (Phillips 1970:128, 144; Hilgeman 2000: 49-51, 113). Neither of these sherds can be designated to these types with any kind of certainty. The absence of Angel Negative Painted ceramics from 15SP202 precludes any obvious connection to the Angel site, the closest large mound complex to the Falls of the Ohio (Hilgeman 2000: 4-19). Angel Negative Painted plates are the only unique identifying decorated ceramic that could serve to definitively associate 15SP202 with Angel (Hilgeman 2000: 166-167). Relationships between Falls sites and Angel are discussed further below.

Decorated Sherd 2 does not seem to correlate to any known Mississippian types, nor does it compare to any documented recovered ceramics from other Falls Mississippian sites or Angel.

In terms of decoration, two sherds from the McAlpine site seem to be fairly similar to Decorated Sherds 1 and 3 from 15SP202. Both of these sherds have curved, trailed lines that are fairly broad. Both have a Mississippi Plain paste but neither have rims and both are too small to assign to any particular vessel class. There is not enough decoration on either sherd to assign it to any type of Mississippian decorated pottery (French et al. 2010: 147-148; Figure 18.14 b., c.).

The ceramics from 15SP202 also have similarities with ceramics recovered from the Prather Mound site in southern Indiana. In total, 3,517 sherds were recovered from the Prather site during a survey conducted there in 2003. Of this number, 3,296 were assigned to the Mississippi Period, while the remainder were classified as either

Woodland or undetermined (Munson and McCullough 2004: 44). The authors assigned all sherds with any shell tempering to the Mississippi Period, and then further divided the plain, shell-tempered ceramics into the types Mississippi and Bell Plain. Mississippi Plain dominated the assemblage at 92.7% with Bell Plain being recognized only in 4.8% of the sherds. A very small percentage of the ceramic assemblage was assigned to the Old Town Red and Fortune Noded types, at 0.1% and 0.2% respectively. An additional 2.1% of the shell-tempered sherds are cordmarked (Munson and McCullough 2004: 47-48).

In terms of decoration, the Prather assemblage does not present a plethora of examples. Only three sherds exhibited decoration, all three showing small portions of incised/trailed line motifs. The authors do not attempt to classify any of the decorated fragments with the exception of one sherd that they believe can be classified with the Ramey Incised designs associated with Cahokia, although my opinion I believe that there is not enough of the design to make that claim with any kind of meaningful certainty (Munson and McCullough 2004: 50, 52). This sherd exhibits an arch and chevron design, with two arches along the lip and the chevron underneath the arches, its tip pointed toward the apex of the arches and the lip of the vessel. Decorated Sherd 1 from 15SP202 does share the chevron motif with this sherd, but the similarities end there. The Prather sherd has incised lines rather than the wider, trailed lines on Decorated Sherd 1. Additionally, Decorated Sherd 1 has chevrons that point away from the vessel lip, and also lacks the arches found on the Prather sherd.

There is, however, one decorated sherd from the Prather assemblage that is quite similar to Decorated Sherds 1 and 2 from 15SP202. This sherd is not classified by the authors due to its very small size, but exhibits trailed lines much like those on Decorated

Sherds 1 and 2. The sherd has two parallel, wide trailed lines, both of which exhibit the same striations along the trough of the lines as is seen in the trailed lines of Decorated Sherds 1 and 2 from 15SP202 (Munson and McCullough 2004: 50, Fig. 36 f.). In addition to these decorative similarities, all the ceramics from 15SP202 and Prather are shell-tempered.

Although determining a chronological position for site 15SP202 within the wider Falls Mississippian chronology (Figure 10) is largely a speculative endeavor without carbon dates, some comparisons between the ceramic assemblages at the various sites mentioned above and 15SP202 can yield some approximate ideas about when 15SP202 was occupied. Development of a wider ceramic chronology for the region would go a long way towards helping to understand the Mississippian presence there, much as the detailed and comprehensive ceramic and artifact chronology developed for the Wickliffe site in far western Kentucky has helped to cast light on the Mississippian occupation of the Confluence region (Wesler 1991: 280-285).

The decorated sherds from the McAlpine site that most closely resemble Decorated Sherds 1 and 3 from site 15SP202 both come from a dated Early Mississippian (ca. A.D. 1100) component at McAlpine and all exhibit a trailed line motif. In addition, the vast majority of recovered plain ceramics from the early component at McAlpine are of the Mississippi Plain type, with a very small number of the Bell Plain type also recovered (French et al. 2010: 164). This is also the case at site 15SP202, where Mississippi Plain dominates. As mentioned above, Phillips associates Bell Plain with later Mississippian occupations, a contention that is backed up by the assemblages at both

McAlpine and 15SP202, and is lent further credence by the carbon dates obtained from McAlpine.

	Early	Middle	Late
McAlpine	1010-1290 A.D.	1310-1400 A.D.	–
Prather	1000-1270 A.D.	–	–
Smith-Sutton	–	–	1400-1450 A.D.
Ellingsworth	–	1240-1380 A.D.	–
Eva Bandman	–	1270-1400 A.D.	1400-1620 A.D.
Newcomb	1180-1290 A.D.	–	–
Angel	1100-1200 A.D.	1200-1325 A.D.	1325-1450 A.D.

Figure 10. Chronology for Falls Mississippian Sites with Comparative Angel Phases

The site 15SP202 decorated ceramics also have some similarities with some decorated ceramics from the Prather site, as mentioned above. The Prather site also yielded dates that correspond with an Early Mississippian component (Munson and McCullough 2004: 16; French et al. 2010: 500), and produced ceramics with trailed lines, as mentioned above, much like those of Decorated Sherds 1 and 3 at site 15SP202.

Interestingly, the authors of the McAlpine report note that both the early McAlpine and Prather assemblages produced a significant amount of recurved/incurvate rims, a feature that was absent from later Middle Mississippian components at McAlpine. The Prather site also produced a high percentage of flared rims as well (French et al. 2010: 165;

Munson and McCullough 2004: 50, Fig. 38 a., b.). Plain Rim 1 from 15SP202 can be classified as recurved/incurvate, while Plain Rim 2 can be classified as flared, both of which correlate to early components at McAlpine and Prather.

The ceramic chronology developed for the Angel site could potentially shed some light on ceramics in the Falls region and help provide a comparative sample for the future development of a Falls ceramic chronology. The ceramic chronology at Angel begins with a minimally excavated and poorly dated early sequence known as the Stephen-Steinkamp Phase. This phase is characterized by cord-marked, red slipped, and plain surface sherds. The phase is so poorly represented that it is used only as a placeholder at present, and is not yet designated clearly as a full phase. The next phase at Angel is known as Angel 2 and is characterized by Ramey Incised var. Green River, O'Byam Incised var. O'Byam, along with Angel Negative Painted designs on plates, as well as loop and intermediate loops handles. The phase is dated to between 1200 and 1325 A.D. The third and final phase at Angel is the Angel 3 phase. This phase is characterized by the presence Old Town Red, Angel Negative Painted, Vanderburgh Stamped plates, as well as jars with Parkin Punctate decoration and strap handles. This phase has been dated to between 1325 and 1450 A.D. (Hilgeman 2000: 224-229). A comparison of this ceramic chronology will be made to the known dated ceramics from Falls sites below.

In terms of direct comparisons to the ceramic chronology developed for the Angel site discussed above, the known Falls area ceramics do allow certain comparisons. Only one known Angel Negative Painted plate sherd has been recovered from the Falls area, at the McAlpine site (French et al. 2010: 146). Despite this lack of direct decorative evidence, the Middle Mississippian ceramic assemblages at both the McAlpine site and

Angel look very similar and exhibit similar dates, those being 1310-1400 A.D. for McAlpine and 1325-1450 A.D. for Angel (French et. al. 2010: 498; Hilgeman 2000: 227). In both cases, these Middle Mississippian occupations represent the most significant occupations at both sites. The dates from the Prather site would seem to compare most favorably with the early Stephen-Steinkamp Phase at Angel, although the lack of much decorated pottery from Prather stymies much comparison.

Between the Angel site and site 15SP202, comparisons can be made concerning loop handles from both sites as diagnostic of an early phase. Both Handles 1 and 2 from 15SP202 can be classified as loop handles. As mentioned above, the traits observed in the ceramic assemblage from site 15SP202 seem to compare most favorably with ceramics recovered from early components at both McAlpine and Prather. The noded Handle 2 from 15SP202 is comparable to handles discovered at Angel in terms of decoration (Hilgeman 2000: 132, 134, 143), but the fact that both handles are of the loop type is their most significant comparative characteristic. Loop handles were associated with the earliest phase at Angel, the Stephen-Steinkamp Phase, as well as the Angel 2 Phase, with dates of 1100-1200 A.D. and 1200-1325 A.D. respectively (Hilgeman 2000: 224, 226).

When all of these similarities are combined, it would seem reasonable to designate the 15SP202 ceramic assemblage to the early Mississippian occupation component at the Falls of the Ohio, correlating roughly to A.D. 1000-1100. Of course, this date range is entirely based on comparison and the date ranges for site 15SP202 can only really be established through renewed investigation of the site and the procurement of reliable carbon dates.

Problematically (or interestingly) the early dates at McAlpine, Prather, and 15SP202 predate the most significant occupations at Angel, and are close to or contemporary with the founding of Cahokia, the supposed “Heartland” of Mississippianism. This would suggest that the Mississippian presence at the Falls developed contemporaneously or even somewhat earlier than the Mississippian presence at the much more substantial Angel site, which would logically seem a likely genesis point for the Mississippian settlers at the Falls. If this observation proves to be true, the implications for Ohio Valley Mississippian archaeology could be substantial. Of course, the problem of insufficient archaeological survey and investigation at the Falls places a huge caveat on the idea that the Mississippian presence there developed at such an early date. Indeed, the early Stephen-Steinkamp Phase at Angel is also poorly understood and little explored, making assertions about its genesis and substance speculative as well (Hilgeman 2000: 224).

Further work at the Falls area will undoubtedly cast more light on the chronology of Mississippian occupation in the region and the relationship of that occupation to other Mississippian centers regionally.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

Site 15SP202 adds to the growing synthesis of data on late prehistory at the Falls. Comparing the decorated ceramics from 15SP202 to those recovered from the McAlpine and Prather sites, similarities begin to emerge. The decorative styles at the Falls resemble each other across sites, suggesting an interplay and interaction between sites within the region. The lack of significant amounts of Angel style pottery, represented by negative painting, point to a more localized and unique ceramic aesthetic although comparisons to Angel can and will aid in the creation of a Falls ceramic chronology. In addition to this, the similarities that exist between Fort Ancient decorative styles and many of the decorative styles present at the Falls point toward cross-cultural interaction in the region, an interaction that was perhaps the most significant mixing of Mississippian and Fort Ancient anywhere. Of course, having a good date range for the 15SP202 site would go a long way towards understanding its relationship to other Falls area sites, but even without this the ceramic commonalities can allow for meaningful analysis.

Ultimately, grandiose or overly explanatory analyses of 15SP202 must be avoided. Due to the lack of substantial provenience or site structure data, there are limits to the scope of what can be said about the site and its place in the archaeology of the region. Perhaps the most important statement that can be made about 15SP202, and the

other late prehistoric sites at the Falls of the Ohio is that they demonstrate the potential and the need for further archaeological work to be done in the region. As is the case with many urban areas, the growth of Louisville has already destroyed much of the archaeological record of the region. Despite this unfortunate fact, there is much that can still be learned from further archaeological investigation of late prehistory at the Falls of the Ohio River. Perhaps the most significant area of interest in the region for future archaeological exploration is the Salt River drainage, an area to the south of metro Louisville that is still largely agricultural and has a high probability of yielding significant finds. 15SP202, as mentioned above, is located on a tributary of the Salt River, and many other sites have been located or reported along the river and on the creeks that feed into it. The artifacts produced by the very minimal amount of excavation and collection done at 15SP202 point toward the rich potential that the Salt River drainage has for furthering an understanding of the late prehistoric presence in the region.

Sites like McAlpine, Prather, Smith-Sutton, Ellingsworth, and 15SP202 have given the archaeological community a glimpse of the potential that the region has to further our conceptions of the Mississippian world. The release of full reports on the Eva Bandman and Newcomb sites, mentioned above, will further reinforce the significance and importance of the Mississippian presence at the Falls. Although historically looked over as a significant region for late prehistoric archaeology, the Falls of the Ohio River region has begun to yield substantive amounts of data as to the nature of Mississippian expansion, the extent of the Mississippian cultural sphere, and the nature of interaction between Mississippian and neighboring cultural groups. An increased archaeological focus on the region in the future could reveal a new and unique expression of

Mississippianism that could add significantly to the corpus of Mississippian archaeology as a whole.

## REFERENCES

- Arnold, Craig R.; McCullough, Robert G.; Graham, Colin D.; Arnold, Leslie.  
2012 Recent Archaeological Investigations of the Falls Mississippian Complex  
Ellingsworth and Smith-Sutton Sites. *Indiana Archaeology* 7(1): 14-34.
- Bader, Anne ed.  
2003 Late Prehistoric Occupation at the Falls of the Ohio River: Somewhat More  
Than Speculation...Somewhat Less Than Conviction. *In* *Currents of Change: Journal  
of the Falls of the Ohio Archaeological Society* 1(1): 3-42.
- Blitz, John H.  
2010 New Perspectives in Mississippian Archaeology. *Journal of Archaeological  
Research* 18: 1-39.
- Carmean, Kelli  
2009 Points in Time: Assessing a Ft. Ancient Triangular Point Typology. *Southeastern  
Archaeology* 28(2): 220-232.
- Clay, R. Berle.  
2006 Interpreting the Mississippian Hinterlands. *Southeastern Archaeology* 25(1):  
48-64.
- Cobb, Charles A.  
2000 *From Quarry to Cornfield*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.
- Cobb, Charles A.  
2003 Mississippian Chiefdoms: How Complex?. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32:  
63-84.
- Cobb, Charles R. and Butler, Brian M.  
2006 Mississippian Migration and Emplacement in the Lower Ohio Valley. *In*  
*Leadership and Polity in Mississippian Society*. Brian M. Butler and Paul D. Welch  
eds., Pp. 328-350. Occasional Paper No. 33. Carbondale: Center of Archaeological  
Research, Southern Illinois University.
- Cook, Robert A.  
2007 Single Component Sites with Long Sequences of Radiocarbon Dates: The  
SunWatch Site and Middle Ft. Ancient Village Growth. *American Antiquity* 72(3):  
439-460.

- Cook, Robert A. and Fargher, Lane F.  
2007 Ft. Ancient-Mississippian Interaction and Shell-Tempered Pottery at SunWatch Village, Ohio. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 32(2): 149-160.
- Cook, Robert A. and Fargher, Lane F.  
2008 The Incorporation of Mississippian Traditions into Fort Ancient Societies: A Preliminary View of the Shift to Shell-Tempered Pottery Use in the Middle Ohio Valley. *Southeastern Archaeology* 27(2): 222-237.
- Dobres, Marcia-Anne and Robb, John.  
2000 Agency In Archaeology: Paradigm or Platitide? *In Agency In Archaeology*. Marcia-Anne Dobres and John Robb, eds. Pp. 3-18. London: Routledge.
- Emerson, Thomas E. and Hargrave, Eve.  
2000 Strangers in Paradise? Recognizing Ethnic Mortuary Diversity on the Fringes of Cahokia. *Southeastern Archaeology* 19(1): 1-23.
- Emerson, Thomas E., Hughes, Randall E., Hynes, Mary R., and Wisseman, Sarah U.  
2003 The Sourcing and Interpretation of Cahokia-Style Figurines in the Trans-Mississippi South and Southeast. *American Antiquity* 68(2): 287-313.
- Emerson, Thomas E. and Pauketat, Timothy R.  
2002 Embodying Power and Resistance at Cahokia. *In The Dynamics of Power*. Maria O'Donovan, ed. Pp. 105-125. Occasional Paper No. 30, Center for Arcaheological Investigations, Southern Illinois University.
- Feathers, James K. and Peacock, Evan.  
2008 Origins and Spread of Shell-Tempered Ceramics in the Eastern Woodlands: Conceptual and Methodological Frameworks for Analysis. *Southeastern Archaeology* 27(2): 286-293.
- French, Michael ed.  
2010 Intensive Archaeological Investigations at the McAlpine Locks and Dam, Louisville, Kentucky, Volume II: Mississippian Period at the Shippingport Site (15JF702). Prepared by Amec Earth and Environmental, Louisville, Kentucky.
- Green, Thomas J. and Munson, Cheryl A.  
1978 Mississippian Settlement Pattern in Southwestern Indiana. *In Mississippian Settlement Patterns*. Bruce Smith ed., Pp. 293-325. New York: Academic Press.
- Green, William and Rodell, Poland L.  
1994 The Mississippian Presence and Cahokia Interaction at Trempealeau, Wisconsin. *American Antiquity* 59(2): 334-359.

- Hammerstedt, Scott W.  
2005 Mississippian Status in Western Kentucky: Evidence from the Annis Mound. *Southeastern Archaeology* 24(1): 11-27.
- Hilgeman, Sherri L.  
2000 Pottery and Chronology at Angel. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.
- Holt, Julie Zimmermann.  
2009 Rethinking the Ramey State: Was Cahokia the Center of a Theater State? *American Antiquity* 74(2): 231-254.
- Janzen, Donald E.  
1972 Archaeological Investigations in Louisville and Vicinity: A Historical Sketch. In *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 46(4): 305-321.
- Johnson, Matthew.  
1999 *Archaeological Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Justice, Noel.  
1987 *Stone Age Spear and Arrow Points of the Midcontinent and Eastern United States: A Modern Survey and Reference*. Bloomington: Indian University Press.
- Kehoe, Alice Beck.  
1998 *The Land of Prehistory*. New York: Routledge.
- Kelly, John E.; Brown, James A.; Hamlin, Jenna M.; Kelly, Lucretia S.; Kozuch, Laura; Parker, Kathryn; Van Nest, Juieann.  
2007 Mound 34: The Context for the Early Evidence of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex at Cahokia. In *Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: Chronology, Content, Context*. Adam King ed., Pp. 57-87. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.
- Kenny, Keith A. and Hemberger, Jan Marie  
2003 A Recent Discovery Made in Connection with the McAlpine Lock Replacement Project. In *Currents of Change: Journal of the Falls of the Ohio Archaeological Society* 1(1). Anne Bader ed., Pp. 65-68.
- Lewis, R. Barry ed.  
1996 Mississippian Farmers. In *Kentucky Archaeology*, Pp. 127-159. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Lewis, R. Barry and Stout, Charles, eds.  
1998 Mississippian Towns in Kentucky. In *Mississippian Towns and Sacred Spaces: Searching for an Architectural Grammar*, Pp. 151-178. Tuscaloosa: University of

Alabama Press.

Lightfoot, Kent G. and Martinez, Antoinette.  
1995 Frontiers and Boundaries in Archaeological Perspective. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24.

Lilly, Eli  
1937 *Prehistoric Antiquities of Indiana*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press.

Milner, George R.  
2006 *The Cahokia Chiefdom: The Archaeology of a Mississippian Society*. Gainesville: The University of Florida Press

Muller, Jon  
1997 *Mississippian Political Economy*. New York: Plenum Press.

Muller, Jon  
1996 The Lower Ohio Valley and its Frontiers. Paper presented at the Southeastern Archaeological Conference Annual Meeting, Birmingham, November 7.

Muller, Jon  
1986 *Archaeology of the Lower Ohio River Valley*. Orlando: Academic Press.

Munson, Cheryl Ann and McCullough, Robert G.  
2004 *Archaeological Investigations at the Prather Site, Clark County, Indiana: The 2003 Baseline Archaeological Survey*. Prepared by Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne Archaeological Survey.

Pauketat, Timothy R.  
1989 Monitoring Mississippian Homestead Occupation Span and Economy Using Ceramic Refuse. *American Antiquity* 54(2): 288-310.

Pauketat, Timothy R.  
2000 The Tragedy of the Commoners. *In Agency In Archaeology*. Marcia-Anne Dobres and John Robb, eds. Pp. 113-129. London: Routledge.

Pauketat, Timothy R.  
2002 A Fourth Generation Synthesis of Cahokia and Mississippianization. *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 21(2): 149-170.

Pauketat, Timothy R.  
2005 The Forgotten History of the Mississippians. *In North American Archaeology*. Timothy R. Pauketat and Diana DiPaolo Loren, eds. Pp. 187-211. Oxford: Blackwell

Publishing.

Pauketat, Timothy R.

2007 *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Pauketat, Timothy R.

2009 *Cahokia: Ancient Americas Great City on the Mississippi*. London: Viking Press.

Peebles, Christopher S.

1990 From History to Hermeneutics: The Place of Theory in the Later Prehistory of the Southeast. *Southeastern Archaeology* 9(1): 23-34.

Peregrine, Peter N.

1992 *Mississippian Evolution: A World-System Perspective*. Monographs in World Archaeology No. 9. Madison: Prehistory Press.

Phillips, Phillip.

1970 *Archaeological Survey in the Lower Yazoo Basin, Mississippi, 1949-1955, Part One*. Papers of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Vol. 60. Cambridge: Peabody Museum Press.

Pollack, David; Henderson, A. Gywnn; Raymer, Martin C.

2008 *Regional Variation in Kentucky Fort Ancient Shell Temper Adoption*. *Southeastern Archaeology* 27(2): 238-252.

Price, Douglas T., Burton, James H., and Stoltman, James B.

2007 *Place of Origin of Prehistoric Inhabitants of Aztalan, Jefferson County, Wisconsin*. *American Antiquity* 72(3): 524-538.

Rees, Mark A.

1997 *Coercion, Tribute, and Chiefly Authority: The Regional Development of Mississippian Political Culture*. *Southeastern Archaeology* 16(2): 113-133.

Rice, Prudence M.

1987 *Pottery Analysis: A Sourcebook*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Shapiro, Gary.

1984 *Ceramic Vessels, Site Permanence, and Group Size: A Mississippian Example*. *In American Antiquity* 49(4): 696-712.

Sinopoli, Carla M.

1991 *Approaches to Archaeological Ceramics*. New York: Plenum Press.

Smith, Bruce ed.

1978 Mississippian Settlement Pattern. *In* Mississippian Settlement Patterns. Pp. 479-502. New York: Academic Press.

Smith, Marvin T. and Hally, David J.

1992 Chiefly Behavior: Evidence from Sixteenth Century Spanish Accounts. *In* Lords of the Southeast: Social Inequality and the Native Elites of Southeastern North America. Alex W. Berker, Timothy R. Pauketat eds. Pp. 99-110. Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association No. 3.

Steinen, Karl T.

1992 Ambushes, Raids, and Palisades: Mississippian Warfare in the Interior Southeast. *Southeastern Archaeology* 11(2): 132-139.

Teltser, Patrice A.

1993 An Analytic Strategy for Studying Assemblage-Scale Ceramic Variation: A Case Study from Southeast Missouri. *American Antiquity* 58(3): 530-543.

Trigger, Bruce G.

1989 *A History of Archaeological Thought*. Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press.

Turnbow, Christopher A. and Henderson, A. Gwynn.

1992 Ceramic Analysis. *In* Fort Ancient Cultural Dynamics in the Middle Ohio Valley. A. Gwynn Henderson ed., Pp. 113-136. Monographs in World Archaeology No. 8. Madison: Prehistory Press.

Wesler, Kit W.

1991 Ceramics, Chronology, and Horizon Markers at Wickliffe Mounds. *American Antiquity* 56(2): 278-290.

Wesler, Kit W.

2006 Platforms as Chiefs: Comparing Mound Sequences in Western Kentucky. *In* Leadership and Polity in Mississippian Society. Brian M. Butler, Paul D. Welch, eds. Pp. 142-155. Occasional Paper No. 33. Carbondale: Center of Archaeological Research, Southern Illinois University.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: William Travis Fisher

Address: 1621 Jaeger Ave.  
Louisville KY 40205

DOB: Nashville, Tennessee- July 24, 1983

Education  
and Training: B.A., History  
Centre College, Danville, KY  
2002-2006