

Archaeological Investigations in the Choctaw Homeland

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN THE CHOCTAW HOMELAND

Jerome A. Voss and John H. Blitz

With a focus on the archaeology of the early historic Choctaw, field investigations in east-central Mississippi resulted in the discovery of 73 sites and the confirmation of two previously known sites. Fifty-nine of the 75 sites had either definite or probable Choctaw components. The assemblages on the historic Choctaw sites typically consisted of a complex of four decorated and four undecorated Native American ceramic types along with Euro-American trade goods that suggest site occupation dates during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The better preserved Choctaw phase sites typically were small artifact clusters, probably the remains of individual households, located on low ridges. In several places these sites were grouped in clusters suggestive of the dispersed communities described in historical accounts of the Choctaw. None of the sites has yielded evidence suggestive of sociopolitical centrality.

The traditional homeland of the Choctaw lies in east-central Mississippi. According to eighteenth-century European accounts, the focus of the Choctaw Homeland was in modern Kemper, Lauderdale, and Neshoba counties, although settlement covered a wider area, including the counties of Clarke, Jasper, Newton, and Wayne (Figure 1).

During 1982, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Southern Mississippi conducted the first large-scale, systematic investigations focused on the archaeology of the historic Choctaw. These investigations consisted of survey in Kemper County, test excavations at several sites, and attempts to locate Choctaw settlements that had been identified in historical accounts or marked on early maps. The fieldwork was the first phase of a comprehensive archae-

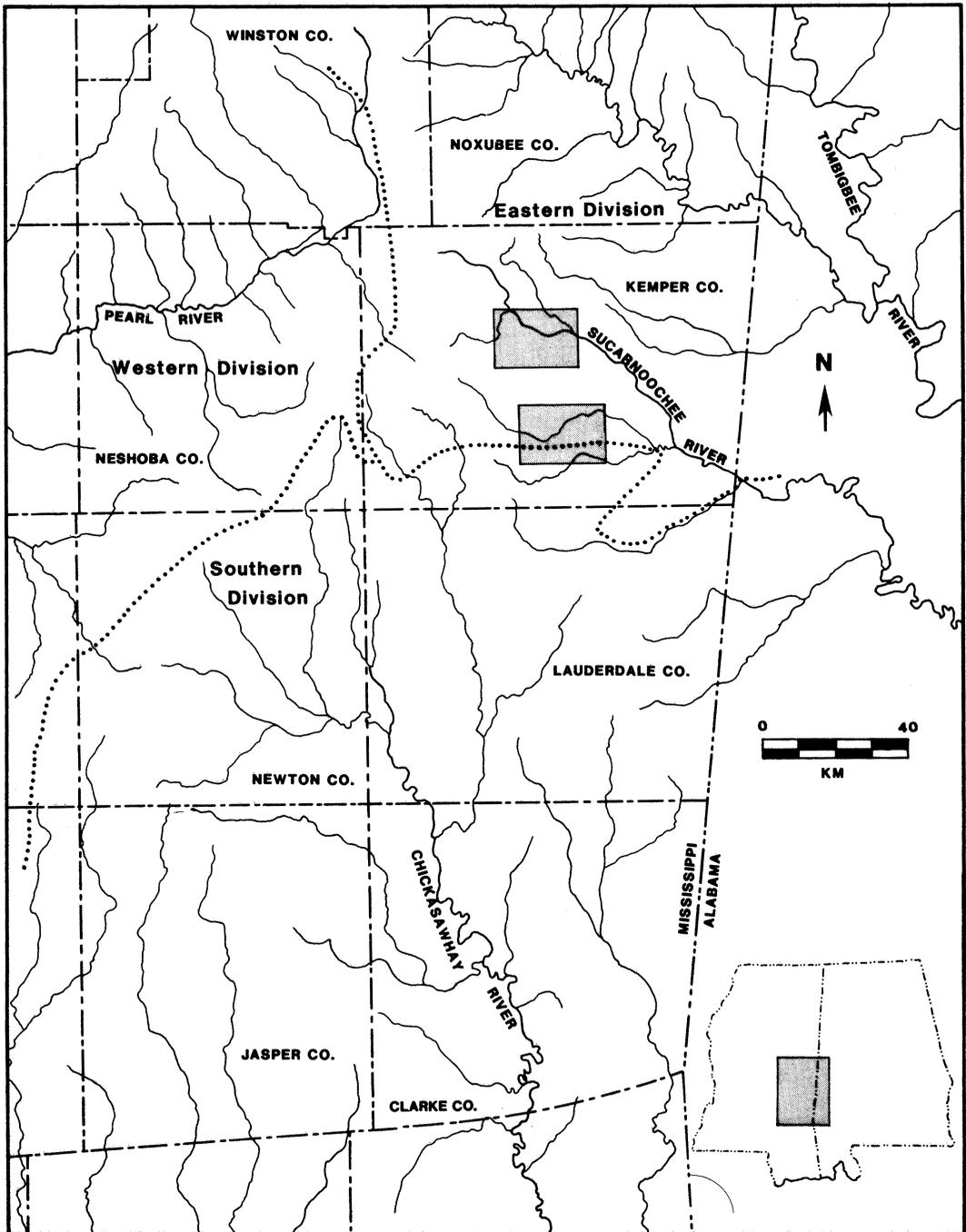


Figure 1. Map showing the Choctaw Homeland. Dotted lines approximate the borders of the Eastern, Western, and Southern Divisions. Shaded areas in Kemper County are the two survey areas.

ological study of historic Choctaw society. The long-term research goals include the archaeological analysis of Choctaw social, political, and economic organization; the study of the relation between late prehistoric and early historic societies in the Southeast; and the archaeological assessment of the impact of early European contact on Native American societies in the region. Given the paucity of previous archaeological work in the Choctaw Homeland, the immediate goals of these investigations were seemingly modest: the location of Choctaw sites, the collection of historic Choctaw material culture, a preliminary analysis of Choctaw settlement patterns, the evaluation of historical accounts as sources of information concerning settlement, and the location of sites with promise for subsequent excavation.

Archaeologists from the University of Southern Mississippi returned to Kemper County in 1984 to conduct test excavations and intensive surface survey at the site of a proposed industrial park near DeKalb (Voss 1984). Atkinson (1984) had discovered several Choctaw phase sites during a preliminary survey of the area. These investigations provided additional information concerning Choctaw settlement and material culture, evidence that both supported and expanded upon the findings of the 1982 survey.

ENVIRONMENT

The traditional Choctaw Homeland lies in the Gulf Coastal Plain, a physiographic province of generally low elevations, meandering rivers, and fertile bottomlands (Hudson 1976:15–18). For the Choctaw the coastal plain was a game-rich expanse of longleaf pine forest, hardwood forest in river bottomlands and swamps, mixed oak–pine uplands, and natural grass prairies. Most of the historically documented and archaeologically investigated Choctaw settlements in Mississippi are in the North Central Hills (Kelly 1974), a region of the coastal plain characterized by rolling to steep terrain and elevations ranging between 60 and 200 m above sea level. The settlements clustered along the headwaters of three major drainages that have their sources in the North Central Hills. The Sucarnoochee, a major tributary of the Tombigbee, flows east. The Pearl flows southwest, while the Chickasawhay flows south, joining with the Leaf to form the Pascagoula of southeastern Mississippi. Tributaries usually are small and fast flowing, with narrow but fertile floodplains.

The climate is temperate and humid. The average annual temperature is 64°F (17.8°C). The region has approximately 230 frost-free days per year. The average annual rainfall is 140 cm, with the highest monthly amount usually during July (Saltsman and Cross 1974:12–15). These warm and moist conditions resulted in a long growing season for the maize and other cultigens planted by the Choctaw.

The modern environment in the Choctaw Homeland clearly is different from that of 200 years ago. Although the region remains heavily forested, the modern forest is recent. Much of the area has been cut over for timber several times. Farms dot the rolling hills and river bottomlands. The intensive lumbering and agriculture in the North Central Hills have taken a toll in terms of both the modern economy and the preservation of archaeological resources. Many areas have been subjected to substantial erosion, and topsoil is very thin if present at all.

THE MISSISSIPPI CHOCTAW

The Choctaw were the second largest Native American society in the Southeast, with a population that fluctuated between 15,000 and 20,000 after initial European contact (Swanton 1946:123). European texts from as early as 1702 describe the Choctaw, their settlements, and their customs. Colored by colonial ambitions, these narratives often were general characterizations lacking specific details concerning Choctaw life. Early observers described the population, political leadership patterns, and settlement locations, while being only incidentally concerned with social organization and customs. Much of the current ethnographic information concerning the Choctaw comes not from these observers but rather from nineteenth-century scholars who recorded oral histories of a way of life that was undergoing change.

The Choctaw were matrilineal. The individual matrilineages were localized units of property ownership linked through matrilineal clans. The clans cross-cut residence and were not units of

property ownership (Swanton 1931:79–83). Above the clan level were two exogamous moieties that probably corresponded to the pervasive red/white dual division of the southeastern societies (Hudson 1976; Swanton 1931:76–79).

Documentary evidence suggests that the historic Choctaw were organized into a number of simple chiefdoms (cf. Carneiro 1981:45; Steponaitis 1978) known in Choctaw as *okla* (“people”). The *okla* was a collection of farmsteads, hamlets, and villages united under a permanent chief: “there were probably at one time from 40 to 50 communities constituting small States, each with its own chief, war chief, two lieutenants of the war chief . . . and an assistant to or speaker for the town chief” (Swanton 1931:95). Although there are conflicting interpretations concerning both the inheritance and power of the *okla* chieftainship (cf. Lankford 1983; Swanton 1931; White 1983), it appears that the chief, who usually came from an influential lineage, had a limited amount of true power and directed policy through his powers of persuasion rather than by force. One important duty involved presiding over the decision making body of the *okla*, a council of older, distinguished warriors. The largest village in the *okla* typically served as the political and ceremonial center; the chief lived there and the council convened there. The village also was the location of a public granary and the site of important social events, such as ball games and calendrical ceremonies.

The political relation between the *okla* and the degree of centralization above the *okla* level are not understood clearly (cf. Swanton 1931:90–102). The early eighteenth-century Choctaw apparently recognized three major geographic divisions or groupings of *okla*: (1) Western Division (*Okla Falaya*, “long people”); (2) Eastern Division (*Okla Tannap*, “people of the opposite side”); and (3) Southern Division (*Okla Hannali*, “sixtowns people”) (Halbert 1901; Swanton 1931:55–56). Two other divisions, *Kunshak* and *Chickasawhay*, each consisted of a single *okla* (White 1983:37). Some accounts mention a small Central Division (*Okla Chito*, “big people”) located between the Western and Eastern divisions. The significance of this division is tied to the issue of a paramount Choctaw chief, as discussed below, since the Central Division often is cited as the residence of the paramount chief. The boundaries between the major geographic divisions as illustrated in Figure 1 are based on the identification of specific villages with one or another division (Halbert 1901; cf. Swanton 1931: plate 3).

Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the most encompassing level of Choctaw political and social organization was an informal, loosely structured confederacy of the various *okla* and the geographic divisions. This confederacy apparently was not highly organized; local *okla* autonomy probably prevented a unity much more substantial than temporary alliances. Several eighteenth-century French accounts mention a great chief of the Choctaw nation, a position acquired by inheritance. This head chief resided at one of several Central Division villages, notably *Koweh Chito*, a village identified on D’Anville’s 1732 map as “the village of the head (grand) chief” (Swanton 1931:91). The significance of the paramount chief has been the subject of some debate. The location of the proposed Central Division at the headwaters of the Pearl, Chickasawhay, and Sucarnoochee rivers, the three major drainages in the Choctaw Homeland, would be optimal for the political center of a unified complex chiefdom (cf. Steponaitis 1978). However, the ethnohistoric evidence suggests that the Choctaw were decentralized politically. Although perhaps based upon a traditional political institution, the central chieftainship of the eighteenth century apparently was a political construct of the French colonial administration (Lankford 1983:24–26). One important document concerning this issue is a letter written by Father Beaudoin, a Jesuit priest, in 1732:

As regards the authority of the Great Chief of the Choctaws, it is not one of the most absolute and his power is far from being despotic in his nation. All the villages are like so many little republics in which one does as he likes. Besides, this dignity of the Choctaws is not very ancient. It has been established only twenty to twenty-five years [cited in Rowland and Sanders 1927:156].

Whatever the significance of the Great Chief, this office apparently did not last beyond the middle of the eighteenth century.

The Choctaw depended upon both cultivated and wild foods. Fields of corn, intermixed with beans and other vegetables, were planted on the periodically renewed, loamy soils of stream and river floodplains. The larger plots were communal holdings, belonging to the matrilineages. Families

maintained smaller gardens of beans, squash, pumpkins, sunflowers, and gourds adjacent to their houses and away from the floodplains. In addition, the Choctaw hunted and gathered wild food resources throughout the year. The most important large game animals were deer, turkey, and bear, which were hunted intensively during autumn and winter. Other game included squirrel, raccoon, bison, water fowl, passenger pigeon, fish, and turtles. Among the wild plants of importance were mulberries, blackberries, sassafras, grapes, plums, persimmons, crabapples, chestnuts, acorns, hickory nuts, and chinquapins (Campbell 1959; Lankford 1983:27–34; Swanton 1931:37–55). Most wild resources were available in the vicinity of a village, although winter hunting often led the Choctaw to distant hunting territories that were a journey of one or two days from the villages. There is no evidence that foraging activities ever led to the complete abandonment of villages at any time of the year.

Descriptions of the traditional settlement system indicate that the Choctaw typically lived in dispersed communities of small hamlets and individual households rather than in nucleated towns. The living structures usually are described as small, one-room cabins made of wooden support posts and cane-and-mud walls. A raised corncrib stood near the cabin (Swanton 1931:37–39). Du Roullet described two settlements as they appeared in 1732:

I shall say that the village of Boucoufa is one of those of the Choctaw Nation, whose cabins are the most separated one from the other. This village is divided into three hamlets, each hamlet at a quarter of a league from the others, and all three surrounded by bayous. . . . The village of Jachene atchoukima is situated on a little elevation or height. The cabins are quite widely separated from each other [Rowland and Sanders 1927: 145–147].

James Adair, writing in 1775, indicates a similar pattern, while noting that frontier communities were settled more densely:

The barrier towns, which are next to the Muskohge and Chikkasah countries, are compactly settled for social defense, according to the general method of other savage nations; but the rest, both in the center, and toward the Mississippi, are only scattered plantations, as best suits a separate easy way of living. A stranger might be in the middle of one of their populous extensive towns, without seeing half a dozen of their houses, in the direct course of his path [Swanton 1931:166].

Halbert's ethnohistoric research (1900a, 1901, 1902) during the late nineteenth century supported the earlier descriptions of communities as consisting of dispersed communities on flat ridges.

Without question, Choctaw society experienced significant changes during the eighteenth century. The early European observers witnessed a society that already may have differed in important ways from the precontact society. During the eighteenth century, the Choctaw increasingly became tied economically to the French and the British, adapting indigenous hunting practices and agriculture to the production of trade goods (cf. White 1983). In political terms, the French support of a central chief was just one aspect of the Choctaw involvement in the British–French conflict in the Southeast. Situated on the eastern flank of the Louisiana territory, the Choctaw were of considerable interest to the Europeans who attempted to manipulate the Choctaw economically and politically. Political intrigue was not limited to the Europeans; many Choctaw leaders played the colonial powers off against each other (White 1983). The Choctaw eventually split into pro-British and pro-French factions, leading to the Choctaw civil war of 1746–1751. This war resulted in substantial loss of life and prompted further erosion of traditional patterns. The tide of Euro-American settlers, missionaries, and traders that flowed into Mississippi during the nineteenth century led to major changes in social organization (Eggan 1937; Swanton 1931) and set the stage for the seizure of Choctaw land and the forced removal of most Choctaw to Oklahoma.

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY IN THE CHOCTAW HOMELAND

Within the region of the traditional Choctaw Homeland, archaeologists conducted only a few organized studies prior to the 1982 survey. In 1925 Henry B. Collins of the Bureau of American Ethnology investigated sites in east-central and southeastern Mississippi, concentrating on the relation between the historic Choctaw and the late prehistoric cultures of the region. Using Halbert's

earlier research as a guide, Collins visited locations purported to be the sites of Choctaw villages. He made surface collections at several sites, finding a distinctive ceramic type characterized by bands of combed incisions on a sandy paste. Collins concluded that this type was associated with the historic Choctaw (Collins 1927). Collins also conducted excavations at several mounds and at the site of the historic Choctaw village of *Kusha* (also referred to by Collins as *Ponta*), where graves dating from as late as the 1840s were uncovered.

Ford (1936:40–49) relied substantially on Collins's work to define a historic Choctaw pottery complex consisting solely of the combed pottery. Quimby (1942), who had found similar sherds at sites in eastern Louisiana, named the type Chickachae Combed, which later was described formally by Haag (1953). For several decades after Collins's pioneering study, archaeologists did little more than comment on this single pottery type. There were no further archaeological studies in the Choctaw Homeland until the 1970s, when a survey in the proposed Tallahalla Reservoir in Jasper County located two small Choctaw period sites identified from a few sherds of Chickachae Combed (Atkinson and Blakeman 1975:111). In addition, Penman (1977) found several historic Choctaw sites in Newton, Jasper, and Clarke counties.

The only well-known archaeological site in the Choctaw Homeland is Nanih Waiya, located at the headwaters of the Pearl River in Winston County, Mississippi. Substantially destroyed, the site initially consisted of a rectangular platform mound, a large conical burial mound, and perhaps other smaller mounds, enclosed in a circular earthwork. Today, only the platform mound is prominent. Ford (1936:46–47) described a collection of pottery recovered from fields adjacent to the large mound, identifying a Woodland component of cordmarked, stamped, and incised sherds, and a Choctaw component of combed and incised pottery. The site of Nanih Waiya has not been well investigated archaeologically and the date of mound construction has not been determined.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

The 1982 survey was conducted in two 5 × 7 mile (8.05 × 11.27 km) areas in Kemper County (Figure 2). The northern of the two areas, extending north and west from the modern community of DeKalb, encompasses the upper Suwannee River drainage. The southern area centers on Pawticfaw Creek and its tributaries. We selected these two areas for several reasons. First, there is a considerable range of landform variations within the two areas, including alluvial bottomlands, low upland ridges and terraces, and relatively steep hills. Second, the two survey areas are in the heart of one of the major settlement foci of the historic Choctaw confederacy, the Eastern Division. Finally, historical accounts place several significant settlements in the two areas.

We employed a survey sampling strategy designed both to increase the likelihood of finding Choctaw period sites and to provide a basis for an analysis of settlement. The sampling unit was the 160-acre (64.7 ha) quarter section. The quarter section is large enough to be located easily using topographic maps and to afford convenient access, yet it is small enough to permit efficient coverage by a small survey crew and to allow the investigation of a relatively large number of survey units.

Given the absence of any prior systematic survey in the region, the initial selection of quarter sections for survey was based upon general anthropological syntheses of human settlement. Environmental and topographic features such as vegetation, soils, relief, and drainage typically are critical factors influencing settlement in horticultural societies such as the Choctaw (cf. Butzer 1982:243–247). Social and political factors also may constrain settlement, particularly in more complex societies (cf. Butzer 1982:247–252; Smith 1978; Steponaitis 1978). Because the Choctaw settlement system previously had not been studied archaeologically and because of uncertainty concerning the precision of historically documented settlement locations, it was not possible to incorporate effectively sociopolitical factors into the selection of sampling units, other than through the purposive selection of a sampling universe that probably contained important communities. Therefore, we decided to select a stratified random sample reflective of the environmental variability of central Kemper County.

The selection of stratifying variables was difficult. Soil surveys of Kemper County were incomplete, eliminating the use of soil type as a stratifying variable. Sample stratification based on vegetation

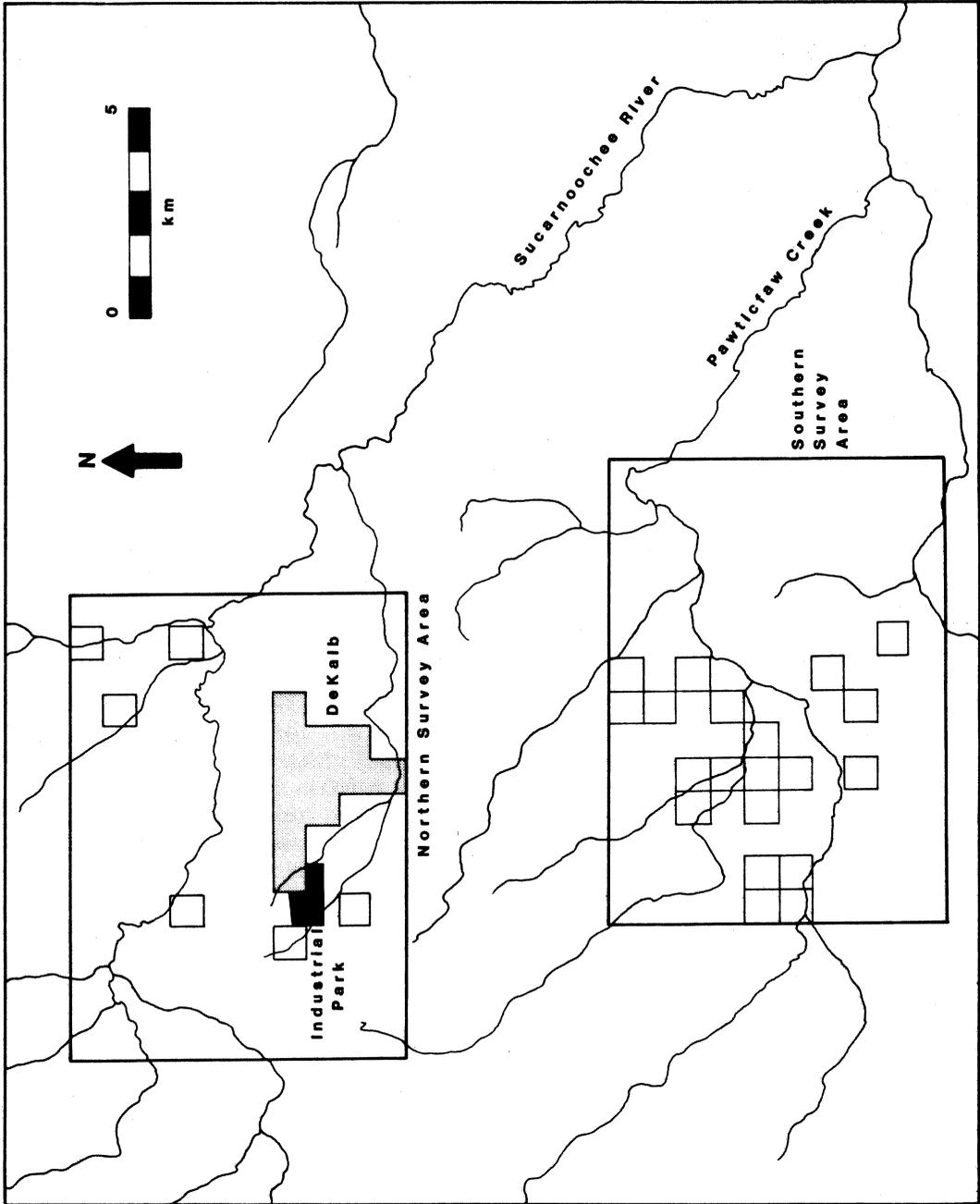


Figure 2. The two survey areas in central Kemper County. The small squares are the surveyed quarter sections and the dark shaded area is the proposed industrial park.

likewise was impractical. Because of the extensive recent lumbering and agriculture, the modern vegetation zones are certainly not representative of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century plant communities. Reconstructions of these communities would have required an elaborate investigation based upon very limited information from early land surveys. Given these problems, we decided to stratify the initial sample on the basis of slope and landform. This decision was supported by both the eighteenth-century European accounts and Halbert's ethnohistoric studies, which indicated that Choctaw settlements tended to be on ridges and uplands. We defined three slope and landform strata. Using a slope indicator template on topographic maps, we assigned each quarter section within the two survey areas to a topographic stratum based on the most common slope and landform characteristics within its borders: (1) bottomlands—low, flat alluvial floodplains and very low terraces adjacent to permanent streams; (2) rolling uplands—flat-to-rolling upland ridges and terraces, defined as having an average slope of under 16°; and (3) steep uplands—ridges and divides defined as having an average slope of 16° or greater. Marsh (1978:66–67) considers 15° as an appropriate dividing point between moderate slopes, which will support both agricultural and residential uses, and steeper slopes. It should be noted that because quarter sections often were variable in landform characteristics, we did record the actual topographic setting of each site discovered.

With a goal of approximately a 10 percent sample of quarter sections, the sample-selection process was divided into two stages. We selected an initial 5 percent sample of quarter sections with the different topographic strata represented in the sample in proportion to their actual frequencies in the two survey areas. This procedure forced survey in a variety of terrain types. Before survey had been completed for this first sample, it became apparent that the steeper upland areas were poorly suited for archaeological sites, as perhaps would be expected, and that most of the Choctaw-period sites were in rolling upland terrain. Therefore, we selected a second sample that focused on rolling upland quarter sections, although survey did continue in bottomlands and steep uplands. This second sample reflected the fact that we expected more sites in rolling upland areas and that there was greater variation in the numbers of sites between rolling upland quarter sections.

We surveyed a total of 26 quarter sections—9.3 percent of the combined survey areas (Figure 2). The preponderance of surveyed quarter sections in the western portion of the southern survey area reflects the greater frequency of rolling upland terrain in that area.

Within each quarter section, archaeologists walked parallel survey transects at 100 m intervals. In cultivated fields or other areas with good surface visibility, sites were identified by surface artifacts, typically lithic flakes and pottery sherds. In areas of poor surface visibility, such as wooded areas and grassy pastures, archaeologists dug small shovel test pits at 100 m intervals along the survey transects (cf. Lovis 1976). Widely spaced shovel testing in wooded areas and pastures, although necessary and practical for covering extensive areas, clearly is biased toward the discovery of large sites. While a number of strategies have been suggested to increase the effectiveness of shovel testing (Krakker et al. 1983), the number of sites found through this method usually is small. We discovered only three sites through shovel testing. It is probable that we failed to find some sites in areas with poor surface visibility. Likewise, even in plowed fields with excellent surface visibility, it is probable that some small sites were missed because of the interval between transects. It is unlikely that any substantial sites went undetected.

Whenever sites were located, we attempted to collect all the surface artifacts and to estimate site size. Because sites were located in a variety of situations, including plowed fields, pastures, wooded areas, and eroded terrain, it was impossible to be completely consistent in site survey methods. At sites that appeared promising in terms of possible preservation, we excavated 1 × 1 m test units in an attempt to locate subsurface features or preserved artifact layers.

In addition to the survey of selected quarter sections, we also conducted purposive surveys at places suggested by Kemper County residents and at specific locations in both Kemper and Neshoba counties identified by Halbert (1900a, 1901, 1902) as the sites of Choctaw villages.

The 1984 investigations consisted of intensive surface survey and test excavation of ten sites discovered at a proposed 220-acre (89 ha) industrial park west of DeKalb in Kemper County (Voss 1984). We excavated test units in six sites with historic Choctaw components and used a backhoe

to scrape the plow zone from selected portions of two sites in an attempt to locate subsurface features.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The 1982 and 1984 fieldwork resulted in the discovery of 73 sites and the confirmation of two additional sites. Thirty-nine sites had definite historic Choctaw components and an additional 20 sites had probable Choctaw components. The artifact assemblages from sites in the latter category contained no decorated ceramics that fit clearly into one of the types of the Choctaw ceramic complex, discussed in the next section, but the paste and temper characteristics of the sherds were extremely similar to paste and temper variations in identified Choctaw ceramics from other sites. Most of the sites in the "probable" category were surface collections of a few sherds. Choctaw sites were found during all phases of investigation. While the purposive surveys in Kemper and Neshoba counties led to the discovery of many important sites, the only systematically collected data came from the survey of quarter sections and the industrial park study. We discovered 15 sites with definite Choctaw components and 16 sites with probable Choctaw components during the quarter section survey. The industrial park investigation led to the discovery of eight sites with definite Choctaw components and two other sites with probable Choctaw components.

In addition to the sites with Choctaw components, we discovered 15 sites with prehistoric components, almost exclusively from the Late Archaic and Woodland periods. No sites were identified positively as dating to the Mississippian period. Ten sites had historic Euro-American or Afro-American components dating to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two sites were not assignable temporally.

Ten of the 75 sites were multicomponent. Of these sites, three had prehistoric and definite Choctaw components, three had prehistoric and probable Choctaw components, three had definite Choctaw and historical-period Euro-American components, and one had prehistoric, Choctaw, and historical-period Euro-American components.

CHOCTAW MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE CHOCTAW CERAMIC COMPLEX

The larger and better-preserved Choctaw sites were characterized by a consistent assemblage of Native American artifacts and Euro-American trade goods. The vast majority of Native American artifacts were pottery sherds of several recurring types. The Euro-American trade goods included ceramics, glassware, gunflints, and trade beads.

The changes experienced by the eighteenth-century Choctaw clearly had an impact on their material culture. As a result of the deerskin trade with the Europeans, the Choctaw gained access to trade items upon which they increasingly became dependent; many items of traditional material culture were discarded (cf. White 1983). For example, there is every indication that the Choctaw rapidly abandoned their lithic technology during the eighteenth century, replacing stone tools with metal and glass tools. The eighteenth-century European trade lists indicate that metal tools were in great demand by the Choctaw (Rowland and Sanders 1927:45; Woods 1980:149). The Choctaw used stone tools in early historic times (Swanton 1931:49–50), but we currently cannot identify these artifacts. Although several sites yielded lithic tools and flakes, these artifacts were not common on Choctaw sites. The few identifiable stone tools recovered from Choctaw period sites can be assigned to known prehistoric types and apparently represent separate components when found with Choctaw pottery. We did recover several thick, green bottle glass sherds, which appear to have been pressure flaked along one edge for use as scrapers. Similar glass scrapers have been reported from a number of historic Native American sites (Fairbanks 1952:299; Griffin 1949). Along with the increasing use of iron tools, the availability of glass for scrapers probably contributed to a rapid decline of the traditional lithic industry.

The one indigenous artifact class that we definitely can associate with the historic Choctaw and expect to recover regularly from sites is pottery. It is not clear presently why traditional pottery manufacturing was resistant to early change. Among many Native American societies in the Southeast, ceramic manufacture continued well into the nineteenth century (Williams 1981). The Euro-

Table 1. The Choctaw Phase Ceramic Complex.

Type	Temper	Known Vessel Forms
Fatherland Incised	Fine grog/sand/shell	Simple bowl and jar
Chickachae Combed	Fine sand	Simple bowl
Kemper Combed	Fine grog/sand/shell	Simple bowl
Nicked Rim Incised	Fine grog/sand/shell	Simple bowl
Bell Plain	Fine shell	Simple bowl
Mississippi Plain	Coarse shell	Simple bowl and globular jar
Unclassified Plain	Fine grog/sand/shell	Simple bowl
Unclassified Plain	Fine sand	Simple bowl and carinated bowl

American ceramics from Choctaw sites date no earlier than the 1770s; these imported ceramics do not seem to be a priority item on French and British trade lists.

The ceramics from the Mississippi Choctaw sites consist of a few distinct types classified on the basis of decoration and temper (Blitz 1985). Classification according to shape was difficult because most of the sherds were small. Simple bowl and jar forms seem to characterize the ceramics.

In Table 1, we propose a Choctaw ceramic complex for the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Choctaw period. The eight types in the complex are found regularly on Choctaw-period sites, although not all are present on every site. Because of site disturbance and the small numbers of sherds in some collections, the assemblages cannot be viewed as representative of the ratios of pottery types in use during occupation. Nevertheless, the fact that so many of the assemblages were composed of a few types that consistently occur together, regardless of frequencies, supports the contention that these types represent a ceramic complex of culturally and historically related types.

Three of the four decorated types—Chickachae Combed (Figure 3a–d), Kemper Combed (Figure 3e–h), and Fatherland Incised (Figure 4a–f)—share similar decorative motifs. The decorations on Fatherland Incised are fine incised lines, less than 1 mm in width, individually applied with a sharp, pointed tool when the paste was almost dry. Kemper Combed and Chickachae Combed both were decorated with multiple, parallel incised lines applied with a comb-like instrument when the surface was nearly dry. The same design elements which were incised freehand on Fatherland Incised are present on Kemper Combed and Chickachae Combed. The lines were applied in bands of 3 to 10 lines; the bands range from 3 to 15 mm in width. The motifs consist of one or more bands forming curvilinear scrolls or meanders, rectilinear zigzags, or a combination of rectilinear and curvilinear patterns. Individually incised chevrons or triangles sometimes occur immediately above or below a band of lines placed just below the vessel rim. The Nicked Rim Incised sherds have notches or nicks of varying widths at regular intervals along the rims. Below these nicks are individually incised, parallel lines, which usually slant obliquely from the rim (Figure 4g–i).

Many of the undecorated sherds probably were fragments of decorated vessels. In the larger collections, the ratio of undecorated to decorated sherds usually is at least 5:1.

In the lower Mississippi Valley and adjacent areas of Mississippi, the materials used to temper pottery became increasingly variable during the late prehistoric and early historic periods (Brown 1978; Phillips 1970). The Choctaw ceramic complex is quite diverse in terms of the types of tempering agents utilized. Sand, shell, fine grog, and mixtures of these were used contemporaneously. These tempering variations probably resulted from factors such as exposure to different ceramic traditions and the awareness of the different technological properties of each temper type (Steponaitis 1983: 33–44). The ratio of mixed-tempered and sand-tempered sherds to predominantly shell-tempered sherds ranges between 3:1 and 7:1 in the assemblages from Choctaw sites. Temper appears to be independent of design variations: Identical combed motifs are found on the sand-tempered Chickachae Combed and the mixed-tempered Kemper Combed.

The assignment of a Choctaw ethnic identity to the ceramic complex is based on compelling comparative evidence. The earliest European observers were not inclined to record details of Choctaw pottery manufacture, and the later notes of Holmes (1903:102) and Bushnell (1909:12–13) were

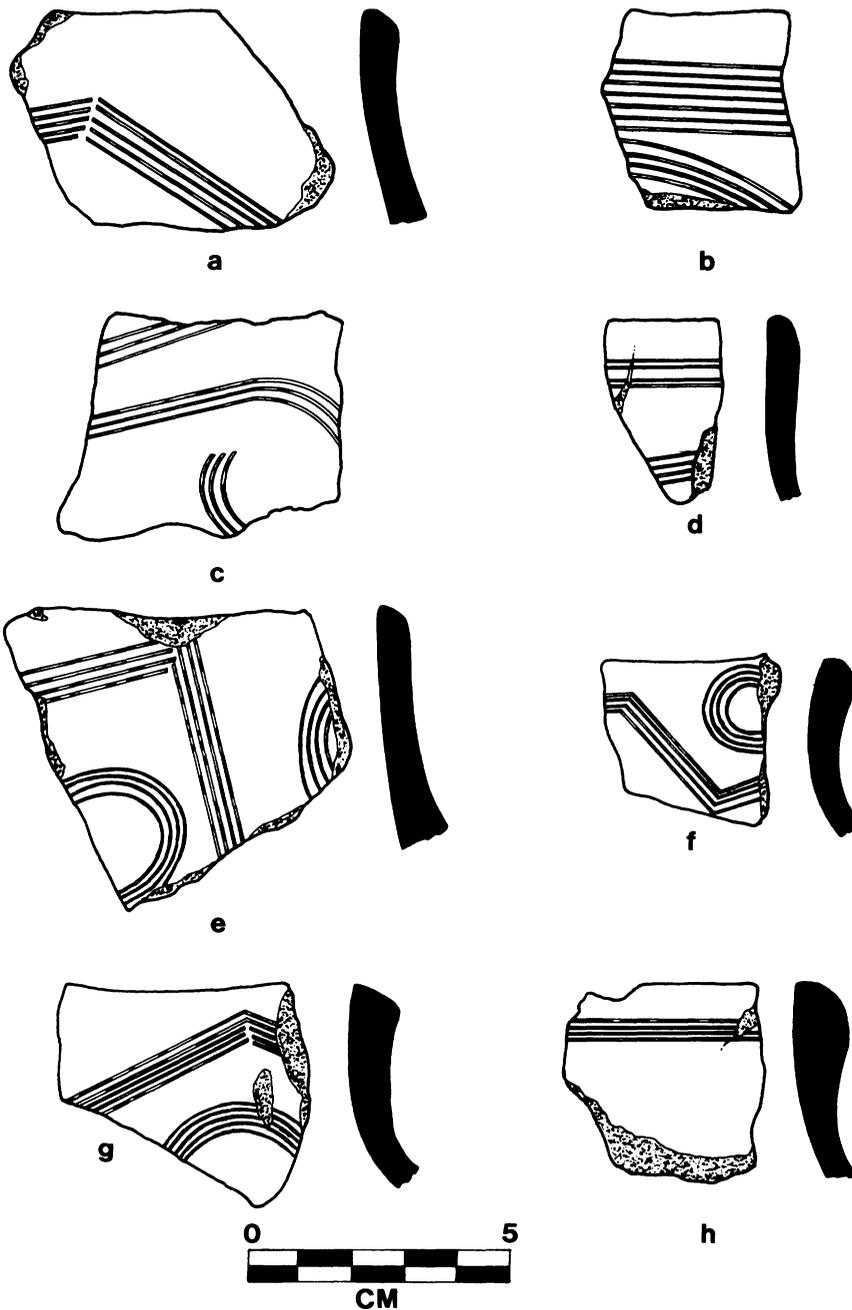


Figure 3. Examples of combed ceramics: (a-d) Chickachae Combed and (e-h) Kemper Combed.

made at a time when pottery and other traditional material aspects of Choctaw culture virtually had disappeared. However, museums in Oklahoma have acquired nineteenth-century Choctaw vessels, some of which are documented as having been taken from Mississippi to Oklahoma during the 1830s (Bell and Baerreis 1951:92; Schmitt and Bell 1954). Archaeologists have excavated similar ceramics from sites occupied by the Choctaw in Oklahoma after their removal to that state (Perino 1978; Williams 1981:116–118). The similarity of the design elements and decorative motifs between

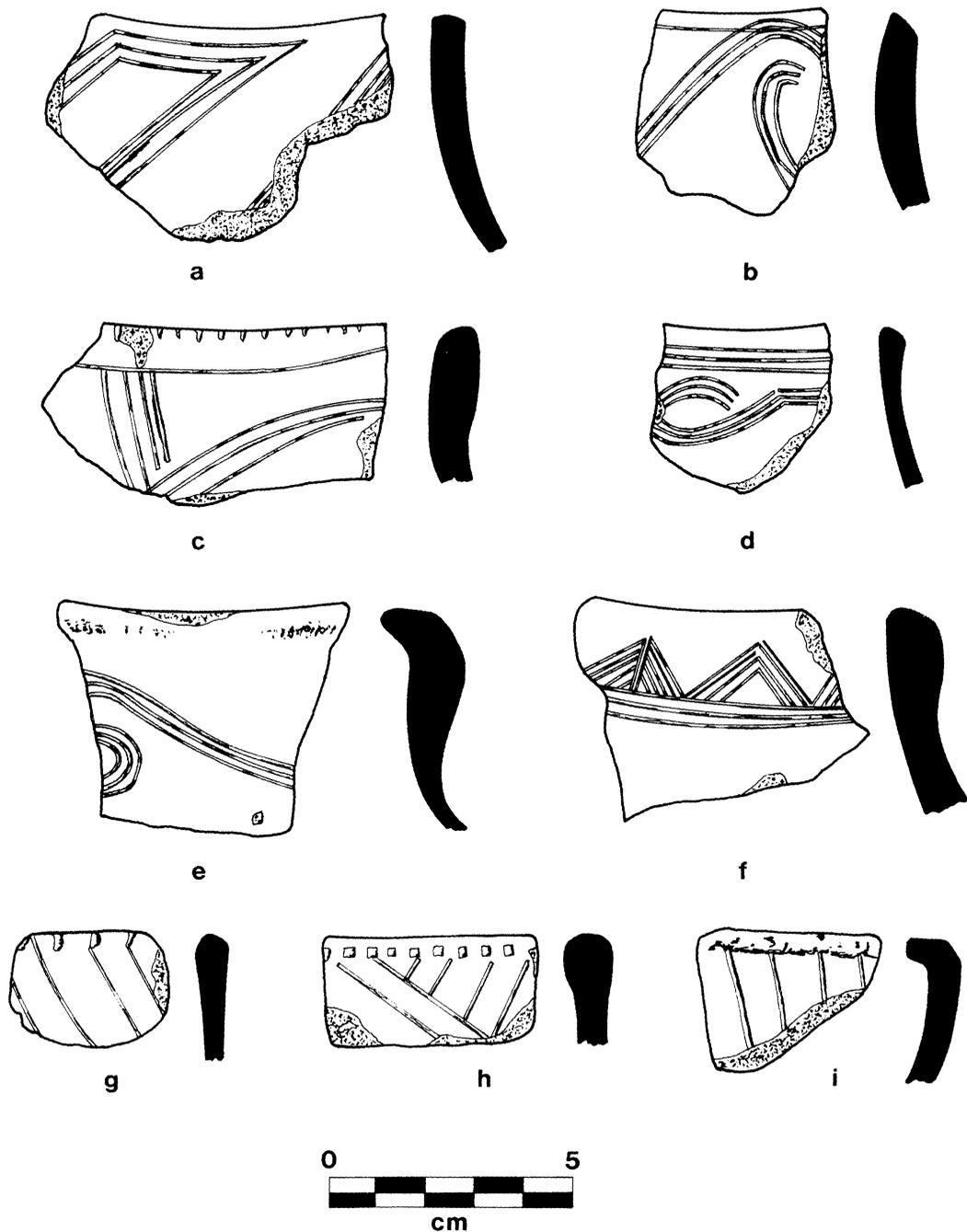


Figure 4. Examples of freehand-incised ceramics: (a-f) Fatherland Incised and (g-i) Nicked Rim Incised.

the Oklahoma specimens and the sherds from Mississippi sites reflects a remarkable persistence of ceramic style despite social disruption and displacement (Penman 1983). Assuming that the Oklahoma specimens are identified correctly as Choctaw, and there is little reason for doubt, this identification can be extended to the Choctaw ceramic complex, for most of the types from Mississippi

sites also are in the museum collections. The only decorated type in the proposed Choctaw ceramic complex that apparently is not in the museum collections is the Nicked Rim Incised. However, this type commonly occurs with the combed types and Fatherland Incised, both documented as Choctaw in the museum collections.

As currently defined, the Choctaw phase lasted approximately 100 years, from the latter half of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. This time period brackets the dated Euro-American artifacts from the sites and also encompasses the greater part of the historically known Choctaw occupation in east-central Mississippi. At this time we cannot assess the complete temporal range of the Choctaw ceramic types, some of which certainly extend back in time earlier than the suggested dates. Evidence that bears on the chronology of the Choctaw ceramic complex comes from a large sample of Native American ceramics recovered from the western Alabama site of Fort Tombecbé, a French colonial garrison established on the Tombigbee River in 1736 (Parker 1982). The context of the Native American pottery assemblage suggests that it postdates the construction of the fort. The decorated pottery is predominantly an unspecified variety of Fatherland Incised, very similar to the same type found on the Mississippi Choctaw sites. Although it is possible that the Fort Tombecbé assemblage represents more than one ethnic group, there is a high probability that the pottery is Choctaw. The combed ceramic types are not present in the assemblage from Fort Tombecbé. Combed ceramics from dated contexts include the nineteenth-century Oklahoma specimens, pottery from the historical-period burials at the Nick Plantation in Louisiana (Ford 1936: 48–49), and sherds from the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century sites in the Choctaw Homeland. The implication is that the combing is a late decorative innovation that was derived stylistically, perhaps during the latter half of the eighteenth century, from the individually incised lines of Fatherland Incised (cf. Galloway 1984).

The Choctaw ceramic complex is most similar morphologically and stylistically to the Natchez-phase ceramic complex (A.D. 1682–1729) of southwestern Mississippi. Both complexes share the type, Fatherland Incised (Steponaitis 1981). The similarities between the Natchez ceramic complex, the historical-period ceramic assemblages at Bayou Goula and other eastern Louisiana sites (Davis 1981; Duhe 1983; Quimby 1942, 1957), and the Choctaw-phase ceramic complex reflect either a common developmental relation, widespread sharing of ceramic styles by historic groups, or both.

Euro-American artifacts recovered from Choctaw-phase sites during the 1982 and 1984 investigations and during earlier studies of Choctaw sites in Mississippi include ceramics, glass bottle fragments, gunflints, beads, iron tool fragments, nails, and gun parts (Blitz 1985; Penman 1977; Ward 1983). Although these trade goods ultimately should prove critical in the interpretation of eighteenth-century cultural change, the archaeological examination of Choctaw acculturation cannot be pursued fully in the absence of data from excavation. There are indications concerning the changing uses of material items. We have mentioned the abandoning of traditional lithic technology in favor of iron and glass tools. Collins investigated the historic Choctaw village of *Kusha*, where he located several graves dating as late as 1840. By this time, the Choctaw had abandoned traditional burial practices (Halbert 1900b; Swanton 1931:170–194) and had adopted Euro-American coffin burial. Yet the Choctaw retained the widespread traditional practice of interring personal items with the dead. At *Kusha*, such items included pearlware, porcelain cups and plates, iron cooking utensils, beads, and personal ornaments (Collins 1926; Penman 1983).

The present significance of the Euro-American trade goods is in providing approximate dates of site occupation (Blitz 1985:86–89; Voss 1984). Ceramics, including earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain, all apparently date after 1770. Six gunflints probably range in date between the early eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century (Brain 1979:210–211; Witthoft 1966). Green bottle glass fragments recovered from several sites are typical of middle-to-late eighteenth-century British spirit bottles (Brown 1971:105–106; Hume 1970:62–68). Two drawn glass beads, which may be included in Brain's types IIA6 and IIA7 (Brain 1979:102–103), have a considerable range of possible dates, but frequently are found on eighteenth-century sites. Not all of the Choctaw-phase sites produced Euro-American artifacts, but the association of these items with the Choctaw ceramic complex at several sites does support the conclusion that the sites and the ceramic complex date from the middle of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth century.

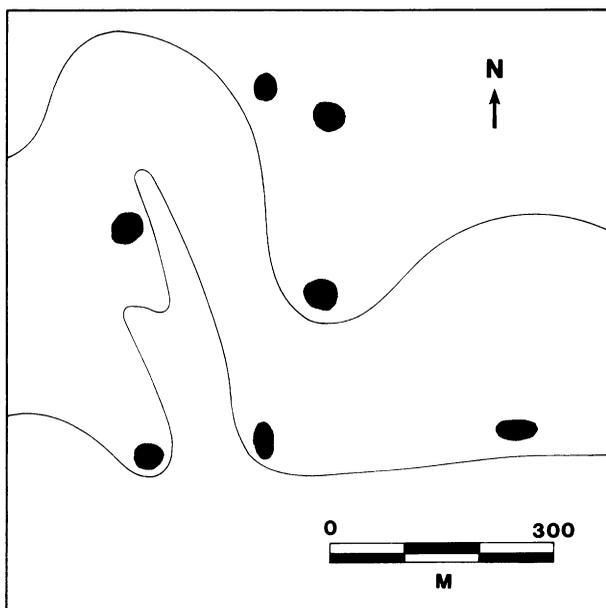


Figure 5. Seven Choctaw phase sites (black areas) found in one surveyed quarter section. Contour interval is 3 m.

SITES AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The Choctaw-phase sites were anything but spectacular. The sites usually were low-density sherd scatters found in plowed fields and eroded pastures. We found no evidence of mounds, earthworks, or other large-scale constructions. The cultural deposits were quite shallow on virtually all of the sites and none of the sites exhibits evidence of midden development. It appears that erosion and modern land-use practices have destroyed the structural integrity of most of the sites. Test excavations at 10 sites (three discovered during the 1982 survey and seven in the proposed industrial park) revealed undisturbed features below the plow zone at only one site.

None of the Choctaw-phase sites was large in the sense of being relatively dense and having continuous surface-artifact distributions indicative of concentrated village settlement. Instead, in plowed fields and other areas with good surface visibility, the most common type of site was an oval or circular scatter of Choctaw-phase sherds and Euro-American trade items. These sites typically covered an area from 20 to 40 m in diameter and often had a denser core approximately 15 m in diameter. Many of the sites initially may have been 10 to 20 m in diameter, but were scattered by postdeposition plowing. Of the 39 sites with definite Choctaw-phase components, 20 were these small artifact scatters. These individual sites, although spatially distinct, usually were found in clusters, with one site separated from another by a few hundred meters. The intervening areas usually contained few, if any, artifacts. Figure 5 illustrates a particularly clear example of site clustering. In one quarter section with good surface visibility near Pawticfaw Creek, we found seven small Choctaw-phase sites, each occupying a slight rise in otherwise flat terrain. The distances between the sites ranged between approximately 80 and 300 m. Other similar site clusters include three distinct sites discovered during the industrial park investigations; the distances between these sites ranged between 190 and 350 m (Figure 7, sites 22Ke565, 566, and 568; 22Ke567 is a large but less well-defined site and probably should be considered as a fourth major site in the cluster). Also, during survey at a location in Neshoba County identified by Halbert (1902) as the site of the Choctaw village, *Imoklasha*, we discovered six Choctaw-phase sites in a field of approximately 24 ha; the distances between the sites varied from 150 to 250 m. We were unable to survey all of this site cluster, which apparently is substantially larger.

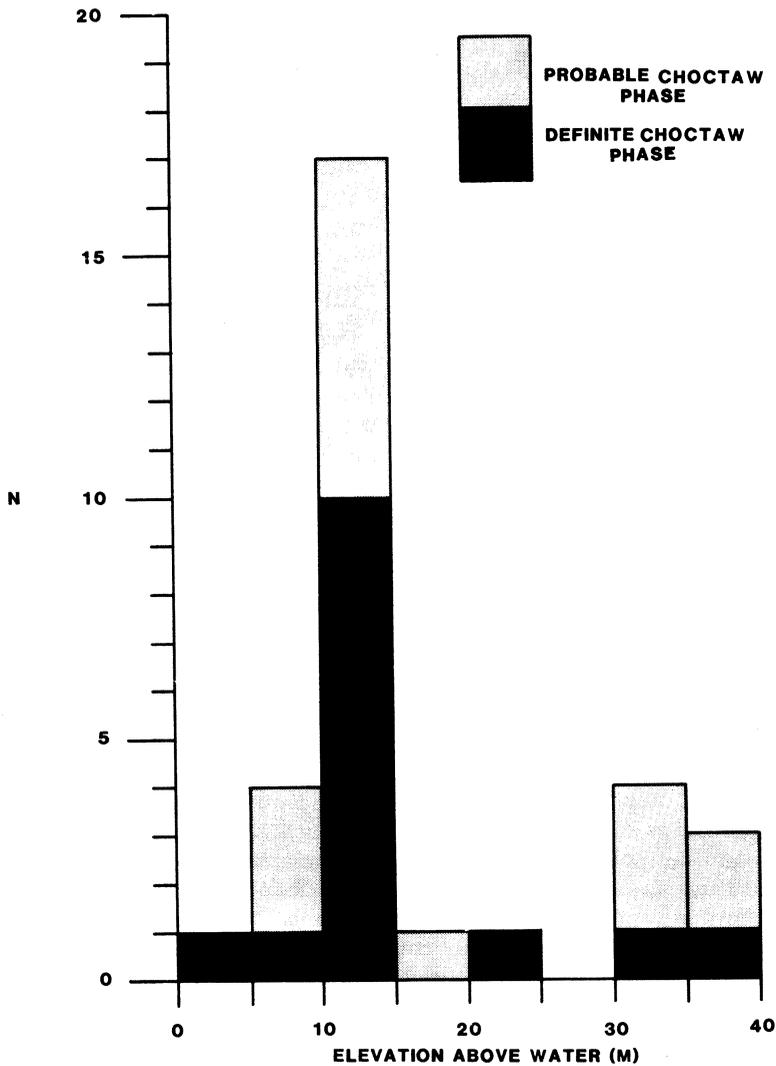


Figure 6. Histogram showing elevation above permanent water sources of definite and probable Choctaw phase sites in surveyed quarter sections.

Thirteen of the sites that can be attributed definitely to the Choctaw phase were very disturbed scatters of sherds usually found in road cuts or areas of severe pasture erosion. It is probable that many of these disturbed sites initially were similar to the well-defined, better-preserved scatters.

These individual sites probably correspond to family residences, associated structures, and work areas. If this identification is accurate, the larger site clusters would reflect dispersed communities. Although there presently is no conclusive evidence that all of the individual sites in the larger clusters were occupied at the same time, there is little variation between sites in the range of pottery types present, and the similarity of these site clusters to historical descriptions of Choctaw settlement is compelling. As discussed previously, eighteenth-century observers commonly described Choctaw villages as dispersed settlements of individual households separated from one another by fields.

A few sites, both definite and probable Choctaw phase, consisted of only a few sherds. While several of these extremely small sites were in substantially disturbed or eroded settings, a few were in areas where surface ground survey and shovel testing probably would have recovered other

artifacts had they been present. The interpretation of such sites, like the meaning of a single projectile point in the middle of a plowed field, is problematic. The only two sites that definitely were in steep upland terrain consisted of one and two sherds, respectively. Halbert (1902:421–422) notes that the Choctaw maintained seasonal hunting lodges in hilly areas. It is probable that the presence of artifacts in steep and hilly terrain does reflect some temporary activity, such as hunting, because it is unlikely that such terrain would have supported a permanent residence.

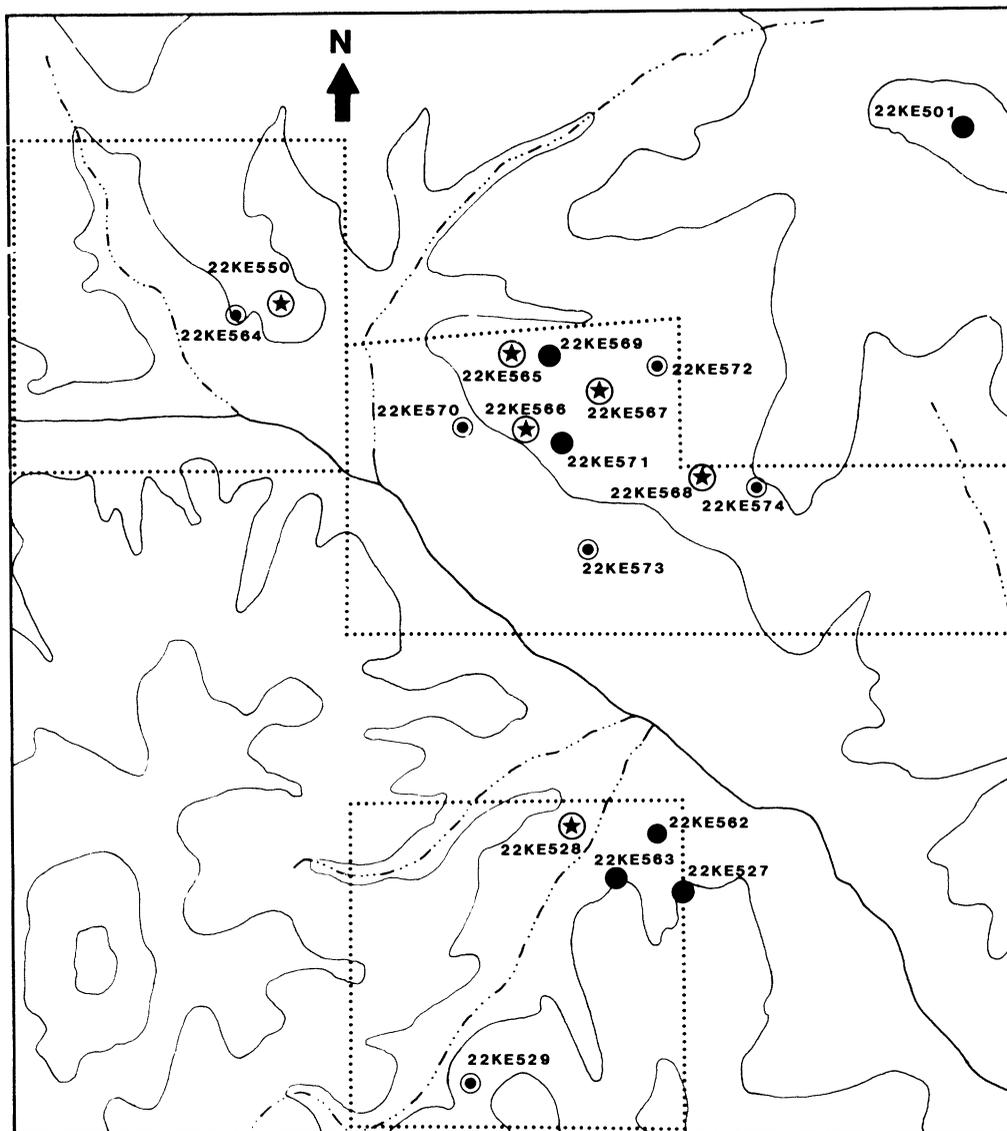
Not only is there considerable similarity in terms of the size and nature of a majority of the Choctaw-phase sites, but also there is substantial uniformity in site locations. The Choctaw-phase sites typically are on low, flat, or moderately rolling ridges and terraces. The sites discovered during the survey of quarter sections are particularly illustrative of this point. Of 15 definite Choctaw-phase sites in surveyed quarter sections, 14 are on rolling upland ridges, while 1 is at the interface of rolling upland and steep upland terrain. Of 16 probable Choctaw phase sites, 12 are on rolling upland ridges, 2 are in steep uplands, 1 is in bottomland, and 1 is at the border between bottomland and rolling upland. This tendency for the sites to be on low ridges is seen in Figure 6, a histogram of the elevation of sites above permanent water sources, as estimated from topographic maps. Most sites are relatively low, although several currently are over 30 m above permanent water sources. Many of these latter sites are very small, consisting of only a few sherds. Although White (1983: 14–15) suggests that the presence of loamy soil was a more significant factor than relative elevation in the determination of Choctaw settlement, the stream terraces in central Kemper County were occupied much more frequently than were the uplands. Unfortunately, the absence of a complete soil survey for the county makes it difficult to evaluate the relation between soil type and settlement.

We have not been able to identify one type of site that would be predicted from the historical descriptions of settlement: the *okla* sociopolitical center. There is no conclusive archaeological evidence (cf. Peebles and Kus 1977) that any of the known Choctaw sites, even those at locations identified as important Choctaw villages, were centers of political importance. We did find a number of sites on a broad, flat ridge extending northwest from the modern community of DeKalb. Included among these sites are those in and immediately adjacent to the industrial park and the site of 22Ke501 (Figure 7). The community of DeKalb has been identified as the location of the settlement of *Holihta Asha*, named as the seat of Eastern Division chiefs (Halbert 1901; Swanton 1931:92). In addition, the broad ridge northwest of DeKalb lies in the area identified in many sources as the Central Division. This ridge would have been appropriate for a sociopolitical center controlling the major stream valleys to the north and south (cf. Steponaitis 1978). However, with the absence of any evidence for site-size differences, monument or mound construction, or clearly aberrant site locations relative to environmental features, we cannot conclude that any of the sites were part of a political center. It would appear that the *okla* centers are difficult to distinguish from other villages archaeologically, a conclusion that may be related to preservation factors or, ultimately, to the nature of Choctaw political organization.

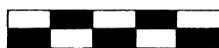
As currently understood archaeologically, there were three levels of historic Choctaw settlement in central Kemper County:

- (1) extremely small sites, usually characterized by a few sherds, found in all topographic settings and probably reflecting either specialized resource procurement activities or post-deposition disturbance;
- (2) household/hamlet sites, characterized by relatively dense artifact concentrations, often 20 to 40 m in diameter, and typically occupying low, flat ridges above permanent water sources; and
- (3) communities, composed of multiple household/hamlet sites in nonnucleated clusters on low ridges.

The 1984 industrial-park survey covered an area between two quarter sections surveyed in 1982. The sites discovered in these three areas provide an excellent illustration of local variations in Choctaw settlement as currently understood archaeologically (Figure 7). Several household or hamlet sites occupy the low uplands on either side of a small stream. Very small sites of a few sherds lie



0 500



M

★ HOUSEHOLD/HAMLET SITES

● SMALL SITES

● DISTURBED SITES

..... BOUNDARIES OF SURVEY UNITS AND INDUSTRIAL PARK

- - - - - INTERMITTENT STREAM

Figure 7. Definite and probable Choptaw phase sites in two surveyed quarter sections and the proposed industrial park. Contour interval is 15 m.

near the household scatters while a site with only two probable Choctaw sherds (22Ke529) is in the steeper terrain south of the stream.

This settlement pattern appears to be part of a flexible adaptation to the demands of maize agriculture in moderately dissected terrain. Just as a major component of late prehistoric Mississippian settlement in the Southeast was the small, dispersed household and hamlet (cf. Smith 1978), so the Choctaw settlements mainly were individual households spread out along and just above fertile river and stream bottoms. Certainly, topography was a primary factor affecting Choctaw settlement (cf. Butzer 1982:243–247). At least in the areas surveyed, there are few broad expanses of fertile terrain that could support larger, concentrated villages. The location of settlements on low, flat ridges probably served several purposes. First, the ridges are well-drained and rarely would have flooded. Second, the flatter ridges provided sites for supplementary gardens, which apparently were maintained between individual houses. The planting of gardens in different settings is a common practice in horticultural societies; the dispersal of gardens may serve to lower the risks involved with crop disturbance in any single area (e.g., Forde 1931:367–370). In the Choctaw case, the upland gardens would have provided some insurance against flooding and the possible destruction of bottomland crops, while the bottomland soils would have been moister and more productive in dry years. Finally, the rolling upland ridges and terraces usually are close to steep upland areas where hunting and supplementary foraging could be conducted.

CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological research in eastern Mississippi is not an easy task. Survey is hindered by numerous small streams, extremely thick underbrush, thickly planted pine-tree farms, and areas of subdivided land ownership. Lumbering, farming, and consequent erosion have disturbed most sites. Given these difficulties, the success of recent archaeological investigations is very encouraging.

Although specific problems remain, the groundwork has been prepared for further, more detailed studies of Choctaw archaeology. The number of known and suspected Choctaw-phase sites in the traditional Homeland now is quite large. Archaeologists have a much better understanding of the nature of the historic Choctaw material culture likely to be found at sites. Preliminary models of settlement have been established.

Among the problems of significance is the absence of a detailed ceramic chronology, which hinders attempts to consider settlement and sociopolitical change. Although it may not ever be possible to be highly specific in chronological terms, it certainly would be beneficial to be able to distinguish early historic Choctaw sites from those of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Also, investigations have focused almost exclusively on a restricted area in the center of the Choctaw Homeland. The degree to which the settlement patterns described in this report are applicable to the whole region remains unknown.

We anticipate approaching these problems directly. Excavations at promising sites should provide information concerning the internal structure of Choctaw settlements and also may provide the basis for a refined chronology. As mentioned previously, there is one known site with intact features and we will be testing other sites that appear only moderately disturbed. We will be conducting systematic surveys in Neshoba and Clarke counties, focal areas of the Western and Southern Divisions. Such expanded survey will be a test for the applicability of the settlement model generated from the Kemper County data. Finally, we will make a serious attempt to locate those villages named as important political centers. Such sites, if they can be identified with some degree of certainty, should shed light on the political organization of the historic Choctaw.

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NAUYALIK FISH CAMP: AN ETHNOARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY IN ACTIVITY-AREA FORMATION

Claudia Chang

This ethnoarchaeological study of an Inupiat Eskimo fish camp examines the formation of activity areas through time–motion studies and the analyses of activity episodes. These observations on two adults using the site during the summer of 1982 are used as examples of how spatially discrete activity areas are shaped by behavioral processes. In this case, activity-area formation is tied to the adaptive strategies of the Inupiat Eskimo cultural system. Specific subsistence-related activities such as food processing, animal butchering, and equipment maintenance leave material residues after tasks are completed. Cognitive and adaptive aspects of the Inupiat cultural system contribute to the spatial organization of this fish camp.

The ethnoarchaeological study of an Inupiat fish camp parallels many recent efforts to observe directly for the ethnographic record how activity areas and artifact discard patterns occur at hunting-gatherer sites (Binford 1978b; Gould 1980; Spurling and Hayden 1984; Yellen 1977). The emphasis has been toward using ethnographic observations as a means for interpreting the cultural and

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