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MIDDLE WOODLAND CEREMONIALISM AT PINSON MOUNDS, TENNESSEE

Robert C. Mainfort, Jr.

Located on the West Tennessee Coastal Plain, Pinson Mounds is one of the largest Middle Woodland ceremonial centers in eastern North America. The site includes at least 12 mounds, a geometric embankment, and associated temporary habitation areas within an area of approximately 160 ha. Of particular significance is the presence of five large platform mounds ranging in height from 3 to 22 m. A series of two dozen radiocarbon determinations indicate that the Pinson Mounds site was constructed and used between approximately A.D. 1–500.

It is hard to realize that in the State of Tennessee ruins of a great ancient walled city with outer defenses measuring fully six miles in length, with elaborate outer and inner citadels, with 35 mounds of various sizes, should have remained almost unknown beyond the bare fact that near the little railroad station of Pinson, in Madison County, there were some mounds and inclosures [Myer 1922:141].

Archaeological sites in southern Ohio and, to a lesser extent, the Illinois River Valley have long been regarded as the preeminent expressions of the Hopewellian phenomenon (e.g., Griffin 1952: 358–361). The Ohio sites in particular include not only most of the largest Middle Woodland mounds and embankments, but also have produced the largest quantities of imported raw materials, some of which were fashioned into artifacts of outstanding artistic merit. Unfortunately, many of these large sites were excavated extensively long before the advent of modern field and laboratory techniques, and while valuable data can still be obtained ex post facto (e.g., Greber 1983), much has been lost forever.

Myer's (1922, see above) brief description of the Pinson Mounds site, which appeared during the waning years of large-scale excavations in southern Ohio, seems to have received little notice by professional archaeologists (or relic hunters) of the period and despite the obvious importance of the site, Pinson Mounds received scant attention in recent Hopewellian syntheses (e.g., Brose and Greber 1979; Seaman 1977; Struever and Houart 1972), a situation partially attributable to the limited extent of research undertaken at the site prior to 1981. Several previous papers have addressed several specific aspects of research at the site (e.g., Broster and Schneider 1976; Mainfort et al. 1982; Mainfort et al. 1985). Here I synthesize the results of over five years of excavation at Pinson Mounds, which have major significance for the interpretation of Middle Woodland cultures in the Mid-South.

Located about 16 km south of Jackson, Tennessee, Pinson Mounds (40MD1) occupies a relatively flat tableland overlooking the south fork of the Forked Deer River. The site lies near the edge of the West Tennessee Uplands, slightly east of the more gently rolling West Tennessee Plain (Miller 1974). Most of western Tennessee is included within Dice's (1943) Carolinian Biotic Province; an Oak–Hickory Forest dominated presettlement vegetation in the area (Delcourt and Delcourt 1981). Three topographic and physiographic zones are accessible readily from the mound complex: the river bottomland cypress swamp, the mixed beech–oak slopes, and the oak–hickory uplands (Broster and Schnieder 1977).

The site includes at least 12 mounds, a geometric enclosure, and associated short-term habitation loci within an area of approximately 160 ha (Figure 1). Early descriptions of Pinson Mounds note the presence of 30 or more earthworks in the complex (Cisco 1879; Myer 1922, n.d.), but subsequent testing has demonstrated that many of these (including a lengthy embankment that allegedly surrounded the entire site) are natural landforms (Mainfort 1980, 1986; Morse 1986).

Although published accounts of the earthworks appeared shortly after the arrival of settlers in

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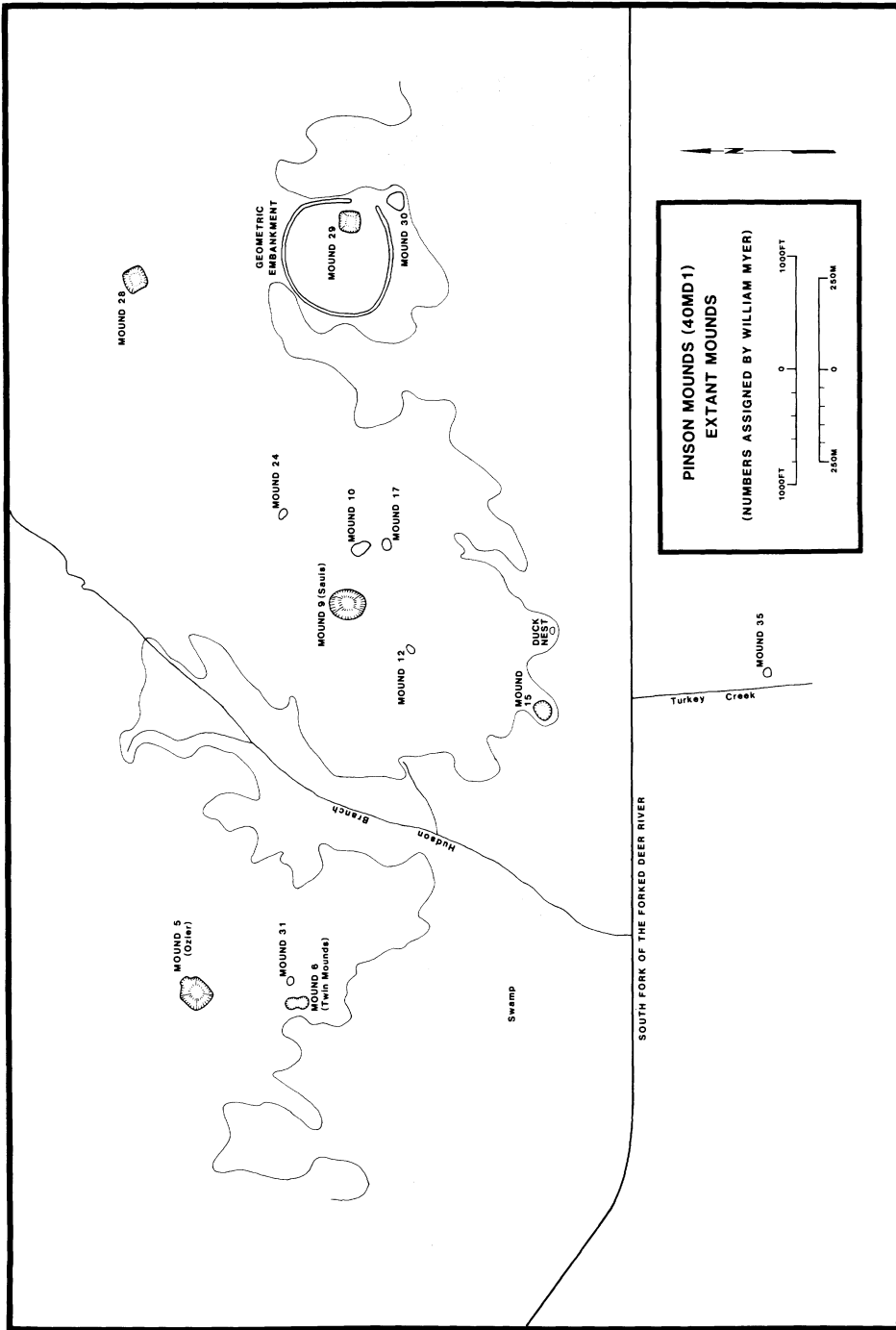


Figure 1. The Pinson Mounds site.

Table 1. Selected Radiocarbon Determinations for the Pinson Mounds Site, Listed by Provenience in Approximate Chronological Order.

Lab Number	Uncorrected Date	Provenience	Association	Comments
UGa-3716	205 B.C. \pm 115	Mound 12, Stratum 5, Level 2	Pre-mound occupation stratum	Overlies stratum containing primarily fabric marked ceramics
UGa-4543	20 B.C. \pm 110	Mound 5, F-1	Hearth on upper occupation floor	
UGa-4174	A.D. 190 \pm 160	Mound 5, F-2	Same as UGa-4543	Feature contained a Furrs Cord Marked sherd
UGa-4909	A.D. 25 \pm 80	Mound 6, F-49	Log-covered tomb	Charcoal from single log
UGa-4911	A.D. 170 \pm 95	Mound 6, F-54	Log-covered tomb	Charcoal from single log
UGa-4677	A.D. 125 \pm 105	Duck's Nest sector, F-20	Fired basin containing ceramics and lithics	
UGa-4678	A.D. 245 \pm 70	Duck's Nest sector, F-20	Same as UGa-4677	
UGa-4679	A.D. 65 \pm 130	Mound 10, F-21	Hearth on occupation surface of mound	
UGa-4680	A.D. 270 \pm 85	Mound 10, F-21	Same as UGa-4679	
UCLA-2341A	A.D. 1 \pm 200	Mound 12, F-61	Pre-mound cremation within Stratum 5	Feature contained Marksville Incised sherds
UGa-3715	A.D. 255 \pm 80	Mound 12, Stratum 5, Level 1	Pre-mound occupation stratum	
UGa-977	A.D. 270 \pm 70	Mound 12 sector, F-39	Hearth disturbed by construction of house (F-34)	
UGa-976	A.D. 290 \pm 70	Mound 12 sector, F-35	Burned post associated with oval house (F-34)	
UGa-3602	A.D. 300 \pm 70	Cochran site, F-10	Roof support for oval house	Habitation area northwest of Mound 6
UGa-4214	A.D. 380 \pm 125	Mound 31, F-6	Under clay ring surrounding central feature of mound	
TX-5486	A.D. 470 \pm 60	Mound 31, F-1	Fire pit on mound floor	Excavated in 1963
UGa-4213	A.D. 740 \pm 160	Mound 31, F-11A	Fire pit on mound floor	Sample of charred cane; date probably inaccurate
UGa-3601	A.D. 455 \pm 60	Mound 12, F-55	Crematory facility; central feature of mound	
UGa-3600	A.D. 475 \pm 60	Mound 12, F-55	Same as UGa-3601	

the area (Haywood 1823; see also Cisco 1879, Myer 1922, and Troost 1845; the site was not mentioned by Squier and Davis 1848); Pinson Mounds was not investigated by professional archaeologists until the early 1960s (Fischer and McNutt 1962; Morse and Polhemus 1963). These limited projects established that most, if not all, of the earthworks in the mound complex were constructed during the Middle Woodland period, but ironically, an isolated Mississippian wall-trench house also was found. The presence of this single feature led many archaeologists to conclude that the platform mounds in the Pinson group were of Mississippian age and, therefore, that the site itself was not particularly unusual (Mainfort 1986).

During the 1960s and 1970s Pinson Mounds was acquired by the State of Tennessee and, in preparation for the development of the site as a state park, the Tennessee Division of Archaeology conducted excavations at selected localities in 1974 and 1975. This work focused on several habitation areas, as well as on a small burial mound (Mound 12), and provided the first Middle Woodland



radiocarbon dates for the site (Mainfort 1980; Mainfort et al. 1982; see Table 1). While the excavations produced an important body of data and strengthened the case for the Middle Woodland affiliation of the site, the age of the platform mounds remained undemonstrated.

THE PLATFORM MOUNDS

In addition to its large size, the presence of five large platform mounds (mounds 5, 9, 15, 28, and 29) makes Pinson Mounds unique among Middle Woodland mound complexes (mound numbers were assigned by William Myer [1922]) and although several burial mounds are present, the platform mounds are the largest earthworks. Centrally located Mound 9 (Sauls Mound) is the largest structure, standing approximately 22 m in height with a volume of about 60,500 m³ (Shenkel 1986); the top is only about 20 m square. Mound 9 is essentially rectangular in shape, with the corners roughly aligned toward the cardinal directions (Figure 2). A series of thin-wall soil core samples (see Reed et al. 1968) indicates that the fill is relatively uniform in composition and, although several possible construction stages can be inferred, Mound 9 lacks a readily identifiable sequence of occupation floors such as those seen at Mound 5 (discussed below).

Two large rectangular platform mounds, mounds 28 and 29, are located to the northeast and east, respectively, of Mound 9, each at a distance of approximately 1,020 m. Mound 28 stands over 4 m tall, with a base approximately 64 m square; auger tests suggest that it was the product of a single construction event. The smaller Mound 29 is about 40 m square at the base, with a height of approximately 3.5 m. Limited testing revealed that the earthwork was constructed in at least two stages, the lower of which was covered with a thin layer of pale yellow McNairy Sand (Morse 1986).

The geometric embankment surrounding Mound 29 is approximately 360 m diameter, with walls about 2 m tall, and encloses an area of about 6.7 ha (Figure 3); this area roughly is comparable to that of Mound City in Ohio. For about 170° of its circumference, the embankment is perfectly

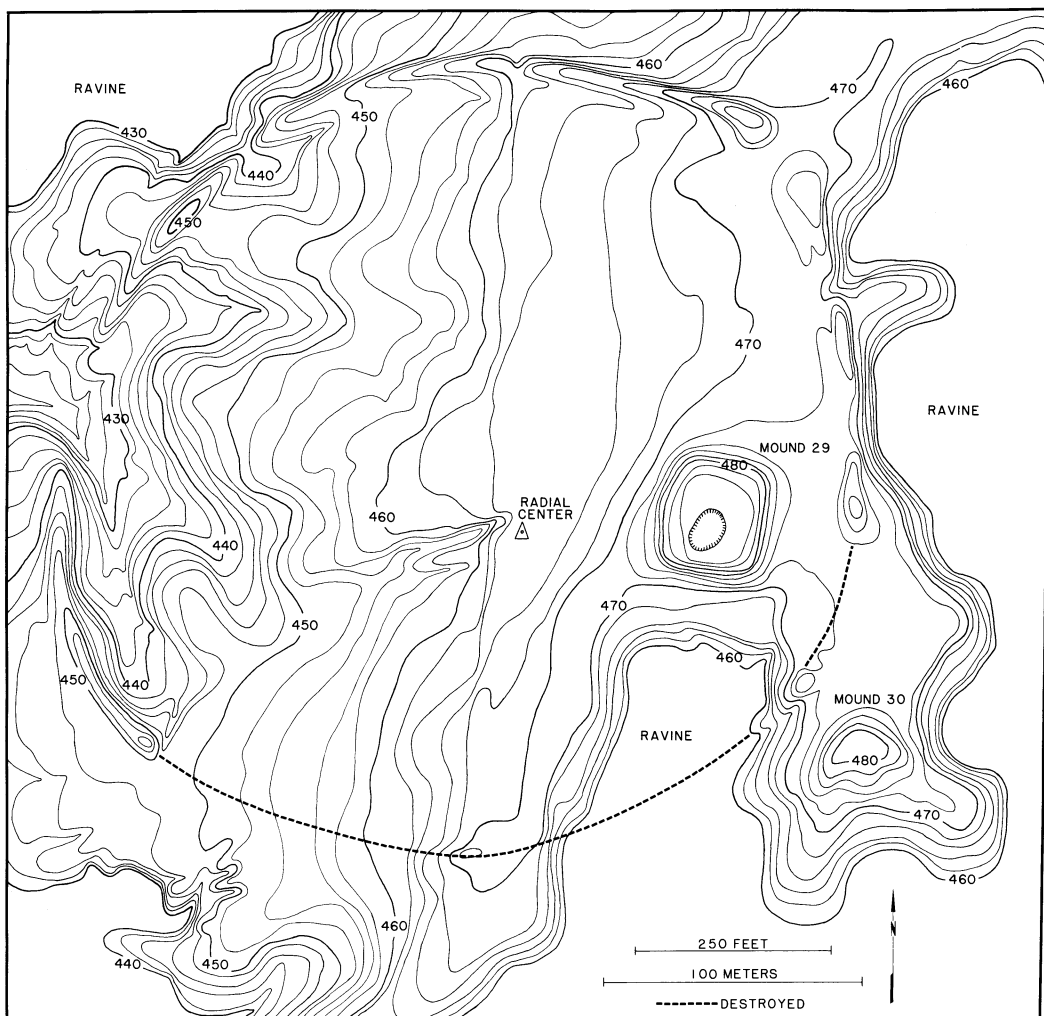


Figure 3. Geometric embankment, Mound 29, and Mound 30.

circular but on the southern and eastern sides, the curvature becomes somewhat flattened, with the wall running inside the line that would describe a perfect circle (Mainfort 1986). The interior is largely devoid of artifacts (Fischer and McNutt 1962; Morse 1986). Immediately outside the enclosure and southeast of Mound 29, Mound 30 is located at the crest of the bluffs above the Forked Deer River bottoms. Described by Myer (1922) as a bird effigy, this earthwork is slightly over 2 m tall and 24 m in diameter; erosion probably produced its asymmetrical shape. The specific temporal relations among mounds 29 and 30 and the enclosure are not yet known, though associated ceramics indicate that all are Middle Woodland features (Mainfort 1986; Morse 1986).

Another rectangular platform mound, Mound 15, overlooks the bottom lands about 600 m southwest of Mound 9. Although damaged by plowing, this earthwork formerly stood about 3 m in height, with a base nearly 50 m square; auger tests have revealed only uniform fill, with no definable construction stages.

In 1981, the Tennessee Division of Archaeology began a three-year testing program at Pinson Mounds, a primary objective of which was to determine the age and cultural affiliation of the platform mounds. Initial excavations focused on the second largest structure at the site, Mound 5,



which is located about 1,100 m northwest of Mound 9 (Mainfort 1986; Mainfort et al. 1982). Constructed in the form of a truncated pyramid, the earthwork stands about 10 m tall, with a base approximately 70×73 m; the top is about 30.5 m square. A prominent ramp extends from the northeastern side (Figure 4).

Excavations, supplemented by systematic auger tests, were concentrated in the central area of the mound, where any buildings, if present, should have been encountered. A distinctive thin layer of yellow sand was disclosed approximately 80 cm below the present surface of the mound. This sand layer, which constitutes the uppermost definable occupation level, is continuous across the earthwork.

No evidence of structures was revealed, but two hearths were exposed on the yellow sand occupation surface. Charcoal from these produced uncorrected radiocarbon dates of 20 B.C. \pm 110 and A.D. 190 \pm 160 (Mainfort 1986), suggesting that the upper occupation level of Mound 5 was completed between approximately A.D. 30 to A.D. 90. Morse's (1986) testing of Mound 29 revealed the presence of a similar sand floor, and thin layers of sand also were apparently used to cover several occupation surfaces within Mandeville Mound 1 (Smith 1975:91-120).

To examine the stratigraphic history of Mound 5, a series of thin-wall solid core samples was obtained using a power-driven auger. These revealed six distinct construction stages, each represented by a layer of yellow sand; an additional sand floor probably was present on the mound surface, but all traces have eroded away (Mainfort 1986). Neither the excavations, nor the core samples produced evidence of water-laid soil deposits associated with the sand floors, raising the possibility that these surfaces were used for only a brief period of time. The multiple construction stages are reminiscent of the later Mississippian substructural mounds, but our excavations suggest a different function for Mound 5, despite stylistic similarities with later earthworks. While the data are insufficient to indicate the function of Mound 5, the apparent lack of an associated building is significant.

Mound 10, an irregular-shaped mound measuring 61 m long, 40 m wide, and 1.3 m high, is located approximately 100 m east of Mound 9. Test excavations indicate that plowing has caused

little damage to the earthwork and that the present height and shape accurately reflect its prehistoric appearance.

The excavations demonstrated that Mound 10 was a flat-topped earthwork, and a large fire basin was exposed immediately below the plow zone, near the center of the mound. No other prehistoric features were encountered, but this may be a function of the limited area examined. Examples of Swift Creek Complicated Stamped and grog-tempered, red-filmed ceramics were recovered from the mound fill; similar specimens were collected in the Twin Mounds and Duck's Nest sectors (see below). The hearth yielded a number of burned wood fragments that produced uncorrected dates of A.D. 65 ± 130 and A.D. 270 ± 85 (Mainfort 1986), implying that Mound 10 was constructed approximately 100 years after the completion of Mound 5.

No radiocarbon assays have been obtained yet from the other platform mounds at Pinson Mounds, but the dates from mounds 5 and 10 and the uniform artifact assemblage from the site indicate that all are of Middle Woodland affiliation and probably were constructed between about 50 B.C. and A.D. 300 (Mainfort 1980, 1986; Morse 1986).

Platform mounds typically are not associated with the Middle Woodland period, but additional examples are known from the Mid-South. It is regrettable that the Marksville site, which has lent its name to the encompassing Middle Woodland phase in the Lower Mississippi Valley, is documented so poorly. Although some of the earthworks may date to an earlier period, the ceramic assemblage indicates that peak usage of Marksville occurred between A.D. 1–200 (Toth 1974). The three platform mounds (mounds 2, 6, and 7) probably are products of this occupation (see Vesceilius 1957).

Reanalysis of artifacts recovered nearly a century ago from the Ingomar mound group in northeastern Mississippi indicates that the site, which includes a large (over 8 m tall), ramped, platform mound, is of Middle Woodland age (Rafferty 1983, 1984). In addition to sand-tempered ceramics of the Miller series (which also predominate at Pinson Mounds), the Ingomar assemblage also contains a nonlocal, grog-tempered, red-filmed sherd identical to specimens found during recent excavations at Pinson Mounds.

Two additional Middle Woodland platform-mound sites recently have been identified in western Tennessee. Especially intriguing for the interpretation of Pinson Mounds is the presence of another large platform-mound site only 5 km to the northwest. Like the larger site to the south, the Johnston mound group (40MD3) occupies a flat upland above the Forked Deer River (Howard 1902; Kwas and Mainfort 1986).

The Johnston site encompasses an area of at least 30 ha, and three mounds still are plainly visible. The northernmost, Mound 1, appears to be a small, conical burial mound about 2 m tall. Mound 4 is a rectangular platform mound over 6 m in height that contains approximately 16,000 m³ of fill, making it larger than most earthworks in the Pinson group. Myer (n.d.) recorded Mound 5 as a flat-topped, polygonal structure about 3 m tall. The irregular shape is likely a result of agricultural damage, and Mound 5 probably was a rectangular platform mound. The Johnston site ceramic assemblage is virtually identical to that from Pinson Mounds, but fabric-marked ceramics are slightly more prominent at the former, leading Kwas and Mainfort (1986) to suggest the site was the antecedent of Pinson Mounds.

Although largely destroyed by urban development, a Middle Woodland ceremonial center almost comparable in size to Pinson Mounds formerly occupied the bluffs overlooking the Tennessee River in what is now Savannah, Tennessee (Dye and Walthall 1984; Peterson 1980, Stelle 1872). The largest of the 16 reported mounds was a flat-topped earthwork measuring approximately 100 m square at the base and standing about 10 m tall (David Dye, personal communication 1984; test excavations conducted by Dye in 1986 revealed further evidence of Middle Woodland occupation). Several other platform mounds also were present. The mound complex apparently was surrounded by an embankment, some traces of which are extant. A number of Hopewellian artifacts, including copper earspools, were recovered during the nineteenth century and more recently by local collectors, leaving little doubt as to the cultural affiliation of at least part of the site. A pit of uncertain function that contained limestone-tempered, fabric-marked ceramics, a greenstone celt, and a Copena point recently has been dated at 15 B.C. ± 140 (Peterson 1980).

Radiocarbon dates from Pinson mounds 5 and 10 provide the first incontrovertible evidence of platform-mound construction by Middle Woodland peoples and provide a firm basis for assigning other Mid-South platform mounds, such as those at Ingomar, Savannah, and the Johnston site, to the Middle Woodland period. The dates also lend a measure of support to the possible Middle Woodland affiliation of similar structures at Marietta (Essenpreis 1978; Graybill 1980), Newark, Ginther, and Cedar Banks in Ohio (Brose 1984; Prufer 1964:51; Shetrone 1925). The function of these earthworks is as yet unclear, but, in contrast to stylistically similar Mississippian mounds, Middle Woodland platform mounds do not appear to have supported buildings on their upper surfaces (see also Williams and Brain 1983:404–405). Further investigation of these structures promises to make major contributions to an understanding of Middle Woodland ceremonialism.

THE BURIAL MOUNDS

Although Pinson Mounds does not appear to have functioned primarily as a mortuary site (the platform mounds contain roughly 30 times the amount of fill in the burial mounds), the site has yielded a considerable body of mortuary data that spans a period of over three centuries. Excavations indicate that no more than six mounds served primarily as repositories for the dead and of these, mounds 17, 24, and 30 require further excavation before their function can be ascertained.

The Twin Mounds (Mound 6), located on the western side of the site about 250 m south of Mound 5, are a pair of large, conjoined, conical earthworks, each about 7 m tall and 26 m in diameter. With a total volume of approximately 3,000 m³, Mound 6 is one of the largest recorded Middle Woodland burial mounds in eastern North America (see Seeman 1977:285–288). Approximately one-fourth of the northern mound was excavated in 1983 (Mainfort 1986; Mainfort et al. 1985).

Five major construction stages are represented within the northern Twin Mound, but the earthwork appears to have been constructed during a continuous building episode, as no water-sorted soils were associated with any strata. The central burial area (see below) was covered by a flat-topped primary mound 2 m tall, with a diameter of 12 m; the top and sides were covered with a thin layer of yellow sand. Encircling the primary mound was a low, narrow platform located approximately 1 m from the outer margin. The area between the primary mound and the platform may have served as a walkway. Comparable features have not been recorded in the Mid-South.

During the final construction stages, the northern half of the mound was capped with a number of large sandstone boulders. Two poorly preserved burials were located beneath the sandstone cap; neither was intrusive. A green schist boatstone containing 32 angular fragments of Fort Payne chert was located in the chest area of one of these—a young male, buried in a flexed position.

A number of features were sealed under a thin layer of gray, puddled clay at the base of the mound. These included six tombs, several pits and basins containing calcined bone, and a number of post holes. The function of the pits and basins is unknown. Most showed evidence of burning and several contained mica fragments, but none yielded identifiable human bones. The small size of these features militates against use as crematory facilities for human remains. Perhaps they were used in conjunction with mortuary rituals, rather than being part of a mortuary program per se (see Brown 1979:218). The post holes do not appear to be associated with a charnel house.

Of the six submound tombs, four were excavated completely. All of the 16 individuals recovered appear to be primary inhumations, and no water-laid soils were found in the tombs. Hence, there is no indication that the tombs functioned as mortuary crypts (*sensu* Brown 1979). Considerable variation in tomb architecture was evident. Two features (F-49 and 54) were roofed with logs that were burned in situ. A third tomb (F-51) was covered with a log and pole superstructure, as well as several layers of matting, while a final tomb (F-48) was covered only with matting.

Feature 48 contained the remains of eight extended individuals resting on a puddled-clay platform. At least six of the interments were young females, most, if not all, of whom wore woven bark-fiber headdresses decorated with thin copper ornaments. Comparable artifacts have not been reported for the Mid-South. No copper artifacts were preserved, with the exception of a fragmentary neckpiece, but green stains in the parietal regions of several individuals suggest the presence of copper ear

ornaments. A freshwater-pearl necklace was worn by one individual, and a thick deposit of *Margarella* beads covered the group of interments.

A second tomb (F-49) contained the remains of four relatively old adult males. At the knees of one individual were two engraved human-parietal rattles, each consisting of a pair of cut cranial fragments bound together with thongs. The engraved designs are similar to those found on Weeden Island ceramics, as well as on objects such as the parietals from Turner Mound 3 (Willoughby and Hooton 1922:56–58) and the Little Turkey Hill cup (Phillips and Brown 1978:162). Other mortuary offerings included a green schist pendant and a mica mirror.

Feature 51, the largest tomb, exhibited the most complex architecture but contained only two individuals: a young adult male and a young adult of indeterminate (probably male) sex. A large freshwater pearl accompanied each interment. The fourth tomb (F-54) was a rectangular pit containing the poorly preserved remains of an older female and an adult of indeterminate (probably female) sex. No grave goods were present. Charcoal samples collected from two individual roofing logs (from Features 49 and 54) produced uncorrected radiocarbon dates of A.D. 25 ± 80 and A.D. 170 ± 95 (Mainfort et al. 1985).

The Twin Mounds presumably were constructed by the societies responsible for the large platform mounds at the Pinson Mounds site, as suggested by the size and complexity of the earthwork and the radiocarbon dates. In contrast to several other large Middle Woodland burial mounds in the Mid-South area, such as Bynum (Cotter and Corbett 1951), Pharr (Bohannon 1972), and Helena Crossing (Ford 1963), all of the Twin Mounds tombs apparently were constructed specifically as places for final burial rather than as processing crypts. It is significant that access to the mound apparently was limited to adults, perhaps a reflection of their ability to contribute to the subsistence activities of the corporate group.

Mound 31 is located about 60 m east of the northern Twin Mound and measures approximately 10 m in diameter; our excavations suggest it formerly stood about 1.5 m tall. The earthwork covered a shallow, rectanguloid burial pit oriented 40° east of magnetic north. Within the pit were the articulated remains of an elderly male placed in an extended, supine position. No identifiable grave goods were present, nor was there evidence of a covering over the pit.

Several deposits of calcined bone were located on the mound floor, surrounding the burial pit on all but the northeastern side. Numerous artifacts, including pottery sherds (primarily Furrs Cord Marked), chert flakes, ferruginous sandstone, several deer bones, and some small pieces of mica were associated with the calcined bone. A U-shaped cap of reddish-brown clay subsoil covered the bone and artifacts, encircling most of the burial pit. Similar features, although lacking associated artifacts, were recorded at the Tunacunnhee site in northern Georgia (Jefferies 1976). Several small pits containing calcined bone and nonlocal ceramics were associated with the mound floor, as were a number of post holes, possibly representing the remains of scaffolding or a charnel house.

Charcoal from beneath the clay ring produced an uncorrected radiocarbon date of A.D. 380 ± 125 (Mainfort et al. 1982), while charred twigs from a small pit containing incised and stamped ceramics in the Marksville style produced an uncorrected date of A.D. 470 ± 70 (TX-5486). These dates, the small size of the mound, and the paucity of Hopewellian commodities suggest Mound 31 was constructed by a relatively small social group several hundred years after the peak use of the Pinson Mounds site (Mainfort 1986).

The internal structure of Mound 12 (Mainfort 1980) differs markedly from the northern Twin Mound and Mound 31. This conical earthwork, measuring approximately 24×17 m at the base, with a height of 1.5 m, was built over a low, clay platform, in the center of which was a large crematory facility. Associated with this feature were the calcined remains of one or two individuals; no grave goods were recovered. A possible mortuary crypt partially was exposed in the southwest quadrant of the mound (Mainfort 1980). Charcoal samples from the crematory facility date the construction of Mound 12 to approximately A.D. 460 (Mainfort et al. 1982).

The low platform is similar to features reported at the Grand Gulf Mound (Brookes 1976), Pharr (Bohannon 1972), and McQuorquodale (Wimberly and Tourtelot 1941). Like Mound 31, Mound 12 was constructed several hundred years after the larger earthworks at Pinson Mounds (Mainfort 1986). The structural differences between these possibly contemporary earthworks is noteworthy.

A significant corpus of Middle Woodland mortuary data has been obtained from the Pinson Mounds site. The Twin Mounds, constructed around A.D. 100, represent one of the largest and most complex Middle Woodland burial repositories in the Mid-South. The log-covered tombs have parallels to the north, particularly in Illinois, and the earthwork reflects manpower and organizational skills commensurate with those required to construct the large platform mounds at the site. Apparently built several hundred years after the Twin Mounds, Mound 31 is similar to many small Middle Woodland burial mounds and probably represents the efforts of a single, small, social group. Mound 12, dating to A.D. 460, is a fairly small earthwork that was erected over a low platform similar in form to several structures recorded in the Mid-South.

NONMOUND FEATURES

Nonmound features, some of which reflect mortuary activities, have been recorded at several localities within the Pinson Mounds site. Excavations south of the Twin Mounds, in an area designated the Twin Mounds sector, disclosed part of an ovoid house, several crematory features, and a number of hearths. One crematory facility consisted of a circular pattern of posts approximately 2 m in diameter that were set in a wall trench; a burned area containing a decomposed, copper, reel-shaped gorget and the calcined remains of a flexed individual was enclosed by the posts. Nearby features yielded a considerable amount of pottery, including Marksville-related types and a sherd of Swift Creek Complicated Stamped, as well as unidentifiable calcined bone (Mainfort 1980:4–12; Morse 1986). This feature complex presumably is related to the Twin Mounds, but further excavations are required to establish temporal and functional relations.

Excavations in the Mound 12 sector (northeast of Mound 12) uncovered the remains of two ovoid bent-pole houses, a style typical for the Middle Woodland period in the Mid-South (e.g., Cotter and Corbett 1951). The larger of these was about 5 m in diameter and lacked associated features and cultural remains, but a second, slightly smaller structure contained a crematory basin in which several human-bone stains were observed. Also associated with this feature were several sherds of a grog-tempered, red-filmed ware of nonlocal origin. Two radiocarbon dates indicate that the houses were built around A.D. 280, considerably earlier than the nearby earthwork, but contemporary with the upper occupation stratum below Mound 12 (Mainfort 1980:15–18; Mainfort et al. 1982; see Table 1).

About 200 m northwest of the Twin Mounds at a locality designated the Cochran site, another tension-poled house was exposed, as were the partial outlines of two similar structures. Associated with the structure were a number of nonlocal commodities, including mica, quartz crystals, Flint Ridge chert bladelets, and copper (Mainfort 1980:31–36). A single radiocarbon date (A.D. 300 ± 70) suggests the Cochran site was occupied several hundred years after the completion of the nearby Twin Mounds and Mound 5 (Mainfort 1986; Mainfort et al. 1982).

Rather than representing habitation areas, Broster and Schneider (1976) suggest that the features recorded in the Twin Mounds and Mound 12 sectors, as well as at the Cochran site, represent temporary mortuary camps. The limited extent of excavations, as well as the fact that these areas apparently were not contemporary with the nearby mounds, renders this specific interpretation tenuous, although it does seem evident that the areas in question were not used simply for domestic habitation.

A possible mortuary activity area in the Duck's Nest sector, located on a small rise about 150 m north of the "Duck's Nest" (see Figure 1), was tested in 1982. Deposits here were characterized by the presence of a dark, soil horizon averaging 20 cm thick that exhibited the highest artifact density recorded at Pinson Mounds, as well as numerous small fragments of calcined bone. Although interpreted in the recent site report as probably representing human remains (Mainfort 1986), it should be noted that none of the bone fragments were large enough to identify. Only a single definable feature was identified within the 70 m² that were excavated—a roughly circular concentration of charcoal and artifacts located near the southwest corner of the excavation area. Associated charcoal produced uncorrected radiocarbon dates of A.D. 125 ± 105 and A.D. 245 ± 70 (Mainfort 1986). The locality appears to have been used only once, for a single ceremony, and the entire deposit can be regarded as a single feature.

The artifact assemblage from the Duck's Nest sector is unique for the Pinson Mounds site. Sandstone fragments were concentrated heavily in this area. Pieces of chert debitage were numerous, as were chert tools; many of the latter are fragments of projectile points/knives. Lithic materials are sparse in other areas of the site. Three pieces of galena and a pair of siltstone digging implements also were found; similar artifacts served as mortuary offerings at Copena sites (Walthall 1973). Additionally, over 2,000 ceramic sherds from a minimum of 47 vessels were recovered.

Furrs Cord Marked was the dominant ceramic type in the Duck's Nest sector (and throughout the site), accounting for 62 percent of the sherds and 19 of the 47 minimal vessels. Six Baldwin Plain and five fabric-marked vessels also were identified. Significantly, at least ten of the fragmentary vessels were of nonlocal manufacture. These include two limestone-tempered vessels that probably were produced in the Tennessee River valley, one or two Early Swift Creek Complicated Stamped vessels (James B. Griffin, personal communication 1983), single examples of Turkey Paw Cord Marked and McLeod Simple Stamped (Ned Jenkins, personal communication 1983), two or three grog-tempered, red-filmed vessels (perhaps from northern Florida or the Lower Mississippi Valley; David Brose and Stephen Williams, personal communication 1983), and a thick, grit-tempered, cord-marked vessel of unknown origin (Mainfort 1986).

Between A.D. 1 and 300, Pinson Mounds probably was the largest ceremonial center in the Southeast, and it is reasonable to conclude that all of the vessels in the Duck's Nest sector were brought to the site by the groups that produced them, rather than representing "trade" items. The absence of definable features in the area excavated is enigmatic, and the lack of identifiable bone fragments from the deposits does not permit more than a conjectural interpretation of the archaeological evidence. Neither Bynum (Cotter and Corbett 1951) nor Pharr (Bohannon 1972) yielded specimens of either Early Swift Creek Complicated Stamped or grog-tempered, red-filmed ware; at the McRae Mound in southeastern Mississippi, Blitz (1986) has documented the occurrence of Swift Creek sherds similar to those from Pinson Mounds.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Not without some justification, Middle Woodland archaeology traditionally has focused on mortuary sites, of which Pinson Mounds clearly is an example (cf. Broster and Schneider 1976). However, this myopic view of Middle Woodland has led to grievous oversights in interpretations of even the ceremonial aspects of the societies responsible for the earthworks (cf. Brown 1979). For example, at Pinson Mounds and, as is now becoming clear, a number of other major Middle Woodland centers, nonmortuary ritual activities also were of major importance. Indeed, the demonstration that platform mounds (which, at this point, do not appear to be associated with mortuary activities) occur in a Middle Woodland context may be the single most important contribution of the research program at the Pinson Mounds site. Unlike stylistically similar Mississippian structures, the flat-topped earthworks at Pinson Mounds do not appear to have supported buildings.

In his landmark analysis of interregional trade, Seeman (1977:224-240) emphasized the unique role of southern Ohio during the Middle Woodland period. By ranking sites according to the occurrence of various classes of demonstrable nonlocal materials and artifacts and plotting this against mound volume, Seeman demonstrated that the largest and most complex sites are concentrated in southern Ohio. Importantly, Seeman's (1977:218) analysis also demonstrated that "there is a significant relationship between the number of types of Hopewell Interaction Sphere commodities present and site size." While the variety of imported goods at a site appears to be a legitimate measure of participation in interregional trade, Seeman's (1977:214) volumetric calculations for sites incorporated in the analysis, which are based solely on "the total mass of mortuary mounds," are inadequate for estimating site size.

Nowhere is this shortcoming more evident than in the case of the Pinson Mounds site, which was relegated to the status of a fifth-order (i.e., smallest and least complex) site in Seeman's analysis (1977: 225). While only the small Mound 12 was used in Seeman's study, of greater importance to an interpretation of the Pinson Mounds site is the fact that volume of the nonmortuary platform mounds at the site is, by itself, nearly twice the size attributed to the Hopewell site, which, according

to Seeman (1977:224), is the paramount Middle Woodland site. Yet, there is not a major concentration of Hopewell Interaction Sphere trade goods at Pinson Mounds. This indicates that the relationship between site size and complexity (as measured by varieties of trade goods) is more complicated than suggested by Seeman, although the somewhat anomalous case of Pinson Mounds detracts but little from the overall validity of his work. In fairness to Seeman, it also should be pointed out that he explicitly states his rationale for employing only the volumes of mortuary mounds in his analysis and also calls attention to the importance of nonmortuary earthworks as reflections of site complexity (1977:30, 234–235). Additionally, nothing comparable to internal complexity of Hopewell Mound 25 or the Edwin Harness mound has been discovered at Pinson Mounds. Nonetheless, the numbers of individuals, preconstruction planning, and level of organization required to build the Pinson Mounds site are comparable to what is expressed at some of the major Ohio sites.

Since platform mounds are identified closely with Mississippian societies (cf. Griffin 1973; Jennings 1974; Phillips 1970), there is a tendency to equate the presence of these structures with a chiefdom level of social organization (e.g., Struever 1968:16–21). However, despite its size and complexity, the Pinson Mounds site, in contrast to the large Mississippian centers, does not represent the apex of a large, ranked, sociopolitical system and did not support a resident population (see Peebles and Kus 1977). Rather, the mound group apparently was constructed for ceremonial use by a number of relatively small societies lacking multivillage political authority. As noted by all investigators, artifact density throughout the site is very low and, further, identified habitation areas seem to reflect short-term use (Fischer and McNutt 1962; Mainfort 1980; Morse 1986; Myer n.d.). Extensive surveys within a 30-km radius of the site have located numerous Middle Woodland sites, but none exhibit thick middens or high artifact densities (Broster and Schneider 1977; Mainfort 1986).

Represented by an undisturbed occupation stratum underlying Mound 12, which predates 205 B.C. \pm 115 (Mainfort et al. 1982), the earliest Woodland occupation at Pinson Mounds is characterized by a sand-tempered, fabric-marked ceramic assemblage and is not associated with earthwork construction. Throughout the mound complex, the sand-tempered types Furrs Cord Marked and Baldwin Plain comprise in excess of 75 percent of the ceramic assemblage, with their mixed sand and clay counterparts accounting for most of the remainder (Mainfort 1980, 1985; Morse 1986). In contrast, the large mortuary sites of Bynum (Cotter and Corbett 1951) and Pharr (Bohannon 1972) primarily have yielded plain and fabric-marked ceramics. There are no reliable radiocarbon determinations for these sites, but the ceramic evidence implies that they should date at least one hundred years prior to the initial construction at Pinson Mounds.

Radiocarbon dates from Mound 5 and the Twin Mounds suggest that major construction at the site began during the first century B.C. and was completed by around A.D. 150. This period equates closely with Toth's (1979) estimated age for Early Marksville in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Crooks, Helena Crossing, and much of the Marksville site itself are believed to date between A.D. 1–200.

Mound 10, built around A.D. 200, seems to postdate major mound construction at the site, an inference also supported by its anomalous size and shape. Based both on radiocarbon dates and associated ceramics, the ceremony represented in the Duck's Nest sector was roughly contemporary with Mound 10, indicating that Pinson Mounds was still important to a number of diverse groups throughout the Southeast at that time.

Several short-term habitation loci, recorded at the Cochran site and the Mound 12 sector, were used between A.D. 250–300 (Mainfort 1980; Mainfort et al. 1982). The relation of these areas to the mound group proper is unclear, as at least some (and perhaps all) of the largest mounds predate them. Two small burial mounds represent the last documented earthwork construction at Pinson Mounds. Mound 31 was constructed between about A.D. 400 and 500, while Mound 12 has been dated to ca. A.D. 460. These mounds probably were constructed by small, local social groups, and it appears that Pinson Mounds ceased to function as a major Middle Woodland ceremonial center around A.D. 300.

A number of participants in the Chillicothe Hopewell Conference (Brose and Greber 1979) state

that Hopewellian expressions in the Mid-South and the Lower Mississippi Valley represent the poor stepchildren of Ohio Hopewell (see especially Jenkins [1979] and Toth [1979]). To an extent, this is correct. The magnitude and complexity of the southern Ohio sites, as well as the quantities of exotic commodities, is unmatched anywhere (Seeman 1977). Nonetheless, recent data from Pinson Mounds demonstrate that large, complex earthworks were being constructed by contemporary societies in the Mid-South on a scale not previously realized. Radiocarbon dates from the site dispel the notion that large platform mounds are strictly a Mississippian phenomenon and subsequently have allowed several other large Middle Woodland platform mound sites in fairly close proximity to be identified. Similar sites of presumed Mississippian age perhaps should be reevaluated, as was done in the case of Ingomar (Rafferty 1983, 1984). Hopefully, the presence of these large ceremonial centers will spark interest in systematic surveys and excavations directed toward unraveling the complexities of Middle Woodland societies in the Mid-South.

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NOTE

¹ By combining the volumes of Mound 12 and the Twin Mounds (calculated as approximations of true volumes [Shenkel 1986 and personal communication], rather than as geometric solids [spherical segments] which were used by Seeman), a volume of approximately 109,750ft³ is obtained. Based on recent excavations, 10 classes of trade goods have been found at the site; only 3 were documented at the time of Seeman's work. Pinson Mounds has, therefore, increased its importance from that of a fifth-order site to a third-order site. Another important site underrated by Seeman is Marksville, at which three platform mounds are present. It also is important to note that Seeman's (1977:225) volumetric calculations for the Hopewell site produce a figure over 30,000 m³ smaller than the estimate of Squier and Davis (1848), who included the volume of the embankments.

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