4. Marvin Smith and Julie Barnes Smith (1989:14–16) have shown that engraved shell masks may have been closely related to warfare and hunting ritual in many different areas in late prehistoric southeastern North America.

5. Thanks to Stephen Davis (1990) for help in identifying the raw material of these arrowheads as Knox black chert.

6. Thanks to Randy Daniel (1998) for the suggestion that the raw material for this triangular point might represent rhyolite or other metavolcanic material from the Piedmont region.

Those Men in the Mounds

Gender, Politics, and Mortuary Practices in Late Prehistoric Eastern Tennessee

Lynne P. Sullivan

The men were somewhat specialized among themselves in their political, religious, and military roles, and they ranked themselves serially with respect to each other. Except for kinship roles, the women were relatively undifferentiated.

Charles M. Hudson (1976:260)

The politics of kinship are fundamental to understanding the organization of many Mississippian communities.

R. B. Lewis (1996:153)

The social and political dynamics of ranked societies, including the roles of elites and the nature of their political power, are topics of considerable debate among archaeologists investigating the late prehistoric (i.e., Mississippian) chiefdoms of the southeastern United States (e.g., Anderson 1994; Barker and Pauketat 1992; Blitz 1999; Emerson 1997; Hally 1996; Knight 1990; Knight and Steponaitis 1998; Milner 1998; Muller 1997; Pauketat 1994; Scarry 1996; Welch 1991; Williams and Shapiro 1990). The degree to which elite status and leadership roles were inherited or achieved, the means by which leaders maintained and manipulated power, and how dissension, factionalism, and resistance influenced the rise (and fall) of chiefs all are at issue.

Ongoing research is delineating the specifics of chiefdom development in southeastern subregions. As the historical trajectories of individual areas are mapped out, we are beginning to see considerable varia-
tion within the larger region. For example, some subregions, such as the Black Warrior River Valley in Alabama, witnessed a long-term consolidation of chiefly power at the Moundville site (Knight and Steponaitis 1998; Welch 1996), while other areas, such as eastern Tennessee, never or perhaps only very briefly coalesced into a large, centralized chiefdom (Boyd and Schroedl 1987; Hally 1994b; Hally, Smith, and Langford 1990). In this latter area, many smaller chiefly polities dotted the landscape (Hatch 1987); at times, some may have become allied, consolidated, or even vanquished, as leaders competed for followers and attempted to turn circumstances to their own advantage.

The study of mortuary practices has proved an important tool for identifying elite individuals, including presumed leaders, and for inferring the composition of elite groups (J. A. Brown 1981, 1995; O’Shea 1984; Peebles and Kus 1977). Many studies of Mississippian mortuary programs interpret as elites those burials associated with prestige goods and interred in public places, such as mounds and/or public buildings. The majority of such individuals are adult males (e.g., Anderson 1996; Hatch 1974; Peebles 1974), a circumstance typically interpreted as implying that men were the political leaders and wielded more political power than women in these societies. Such interpretations are reinforced by accounts of early chroniclers, especially those of the Mississippi Valley (e.g., Tregle 1975), who detail the political activities of, and offices held by, men (see, for example, Scarry 1992; M. T. Smith and Hally 1992). On the other hand, in some areas of the Southeast, women sometimes are mentioned as holding chiefly office (Trocolli 1999), with the chiefdom of Coitachequi in present-day South Carolina as the oft-cited example (DePratter 1994).

Southeastern tribes are not necessarily portrayed as having political structures dominated by men when ethnohistorical research is geared to recognize gender bias in firsthand accounts of historic native societies. Furthermore, all southeastern groups were (and are) not the same in how or how much political influence and power women wield. For example, Sattler (1995) discusses variation in the degree of political influence of women among eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Muskogee (Creek) and Cherokee, which he describes as representing “the two extremes regarding gender status in the Southeast” (Sattler 1995:216). He notes that Cherokee women held offices as clan leaders, controlled agricultural production, and were much more politically influential than women among their Creek neighbors.

I argue that gender-related differences observed in Mississippian mor-
tuary programs in eastern Tennessee correlate with gender-specific differences in political leadership and in how men and women acquired prestige. Mortuary data from the Dallas phase (ca. A.D. 1200–1600) Toqua site suggests gendered political spheres similar to those of the historic Cherokee in which women wielded considerable political influence. This finding does not necessarily indicate ethnic continuity between the prehistoric chiefdoms of the Upper Tennessee Valley and the historic Cherokee, nor does it imply similar gender and power relationships for all Mississippian groups. This research does suggest that a long-standing “balance of power” of the genders may relate to the history of chiefdom development characteristic of this southeastern subregion.

Politics, Gender, and “Public versus Domestic” Contexts
The ability to wield political power, influence, and authority is entwined with an individual’s social rank and prestige. Elevated social rank often carries with it the potential to affect political decision making, but actual use of this potential is contingent upon culturally constructed and sanctioned contexts. Such contexts may include the way(s) social rank is determined, the particular social institutions to which one’s elite status (and presumed prestige) is attached, as well as an individual’s age and gender. The means and ability to express political power thus may vary according to contexts and historical circumstances. Different venues for political expression do not inherently imply different degrees of power, influence, or authority, or dominance of one group over another. When evaluating the political roles and effectiveness of various groups, one must be aware of the possibilities of multiple venues and for different groups to have more or less power depending upon circumstances and contexts, as well as different ways to affect decision making.

The concept of “heterarchy” (Crumley 1995; Levy 1995) is appropriate to this discussion, as it allows for multiple lines of empowerment in different contexts and circumstances (Nelson 1997:148). Crumley (1995:3) defines heterarchy as “the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways.” Rather than a strictly hierarchical arrangement of men over women, gender may well have been a heterarchical context in some prehistoric southeastern societies, in the sense that men may have exercised more influence and power in some contexts, and women in others. As Miller (1993:4) states: “Assessing the existence of sex and gender hierarchies demands that we look more closely than the level of ‘society’… . Sensitivity to subgroup and context-based variation
existing within more general patterns provides a richer picture of sex and gender hierarchies.”

Crumley (1995:3) further observes that “power can be counterpoised rather than ranked” (see also Stillitoe 1985). An arrangement that afforded power and influence to women in one context and to men in another may have created a set of checks and balances on political power and action. Among the Cherokee, for example, such a balance of power relates to decisions concerning intersocietal conflict (i.e., war) (Sattler 1995:222). Although the men controlled the war organization, Cherokee women could reject the men’s decision to go to war.

Such gender-related distinctions in political influence and prestige, as well as counterposition of power between the genders, receive little consideration in the archaeological literature of the prehistoric Southeast (N. M. White 1999). This state of affairs is all the more unsatisfactory given the Southeast’s well-documented matrilineal kinship systems, matrilocality, residence, marked sexual division of labor, and historically known female chiefs. A relevant point about chieftoms, matrilocality, and women’s status is made by Harris (1993:66). He states that in “chieftoms which typically engage in warfare with distant enemies . . . external warfare enhances rather than worsens the status of women since it results in avunculocal or matrilocally organized residence.” According to Harris, this residence pattern comes about because when a man is gone from the village for long periods of time, the woman can trust most with his possessions is his sister, since she shares a common interest in property. “Where matrilocality prevails . . . women tend to take control of the entire domestic sphere of life [but] . . . the effects of matrilocality on women’s status extend beyond the domestic sphere. As men transfer the responsibility for managing the cultivation of their lands to female kin, women come to possess the means for influencing political, military, and religious policies” (Harris 1993:67-68).

Nelson (1997:132) notes that an early debate in feminist cultural anthropology was whether or not most cultures were divided “into domestic spheres and public spaces, gendered female and male, respectively.” Friedl (1967) made the important observation that “women’s status may be low in the public domain of most societies, but it may be high, even dominant, relative to males in the domestic domain” (Miller 1993:7). Furthermore, the valuation of “public” over “domestic” is a direct influence of western European ideology and historical traditions that may have no relevance in nonwestern cultures (MacCormack 1980; Mathews 1985; Rosaldo 1980; Rothstein 1982; Sudarkasa 1981). To be useful, public/domestic and male/female dichotomies must be situated within broader conceptual schemes that organize particular cultures (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988;481). The public sphere does not always contain and dominate the domestic sphere, nor is domestic always devalued relative to public. Various cultures define “domestic” and “public,” and associate these spheres with femininity and maleness, in different ways. Considering the public and domestic spheres as separate and distinct worlds fails to recognize that they are aspects of the same cultural tradition (Bujra 1979; Yanagisako and Collier 1987). As Hendon (1996:46–47) notes, the stereotypical domestic unit, “the household[,] is, in effect, politicized in that its internal relations are inextricable from the larger economic and political structure of society . . . Domestic action and relations . . . are of larger political and economic significance precisely because they are not separable from the relationships and processes that make up the ‘public domain’. . . . Household relations and actions are not isolated from society as a whole nor do they merely react passively to changes imposed from outside.”

These cross-cultural findings allow archaeologists to envision “women in many past cultures” not only “as acting publicly, with earned prestige or legitimate power” (Nelson 1997:132) but as influential and powerful actors and producers within households and domestic kin units. Such interpretations have been damped in the Southeast because of a focus on the public political arena, which early (male) observers describe in many southeastern societies as mainly a male one (Gearing 1962; Hudson 1979; Swanton 1946). Women’s relative invisibility in this public sphere does not necessarily mean they lacked prestige or power (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988), and it is not a new idea that women’s political participation often takes the form of influence “behind the scenes” (see, e.g., Friedl 1967; Lamphere 1974) (Albeit these “male scenes” may well have been “behind the female scenes” in certain contexts.)

Nonetheless, a higher regard for public positions of authority held by men and the assumption that these public roles correlate with male dominance pervades the early accounts of southeastern societies and has, by extension, influenced archaeological thinking. The presumption of male dominance through political leadership for all Mississippian societies, based on the predominance of male burials in southeastern platform mounds (i.e., public structures), is, I suggest, an example of how such Eurocentric constructs have been adopted in archaeological inter-
prettation. The following brief review of pertinent ethnohistoric information provides several important lessons for considering the archaeological record of the late prehistoric Southeast.

Politics and Gender in Historic Native Societies of the Southeast

“Each culture must select a sex-role plan—that is, a template for the organization of sex role expectations... Such plans help men and women orient themselves as male and female to each other, to the world around them, and to the growing boys and girls whose behavior they must shape to a commonly accepted mold” (Sandy 1981:3). Hudson (1976:260) states that in the native societies of the Southeast, “the roles of men and women were so different that the two sexes were almost like different species.” There were differences among southeastern native societies as to how elite status, political influence, and prestige were allocated that had bearing on the degree of political influence of women. In general, social institutions separated men and women, set them upon separate tracks, and contextualized how and when in their lives men or women could expect to be politically influential.

In many southeastern societies, as males matured, they progressed through a series of age grades that related to social roles within the society (Gearing 1962:18). Young men also received war ranks and were expected to participate in war parties. “One of the main preoccupations of Southeastern Indian men was the acquisition of war names and titles” (Hudson 1976:325). The war organization, an almost exclusively male domain, was the realm in which men were best able to achieve prestige. In most societies, the warriors were divided into ranks correlating with war-earned achievements. As men progressed through the ranks of the war organization, they collected symbols of prestige as public recognition of their prowess and bravery. Numerous sources mention the use or presentation of objects to men in recognition of their achievements as warriors, in conjunction with bestowal of titles (Hudson 1976:325–26; Swanton 1946:696). This specific mode of advancement was by and large a male-dominated trajectory. By age fifty to sixty, a male ceased going to war. Instead, he might assume an important role in guiding the community and serve as an advisor and councilor. Among the Cherokee, for example, the elder age status “beloved man” carried much prestige and influence (Gearing 1962:18).

Gender bias in early ethnohistoric accounts leaves us with little information on the life trajectories of women. Although men often moved through a strict hierarchy of social and political prestige, partially based on age, there is not such a clearly defined pattern for females. Nonetheless, household matriarchs would have ties of obligation over their progeny. These ties are an important source of women’s prestige and power that correlate with an increase in women’s status with age in many cultures (J. K. Brown and Kerns 1985), especially in matrilineal societies such as those of the Southeast. Crown and Fish (1996) note several cross-cultural studies reporting that postmenopausal women often acquired increased prestige and/or special status, and sometimes participated with men in political and religious activities from which younger women were excluded. They (Crown and Fish 1996) also find that the prestige of Classic-period Hobokam women increased with age, as reflected in burial patterns.

Such general life trajectories for men and women were common to many southeastern groups, but the accompanying contexts that determined elite status were quite variable. Inheritance and achievement both were ways in which elite status could be gained, but the degree to which each of these methods was followed varied among societies. The Muskegee (Creek) and Cherokee examples offered by Sattler (1995) illustrate these points. Although these groups share many similar cultural traditions (including matrilineal descent and matrilocal residence), leadership positions and prestige depended more upon inheritance among the Creek than among the Cherokee. Sattler (1995) also relates differences in women’s access to political office and their degree of political influence to these distinctions in determining elite status and leadership positions. His data pertain to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, although he notes that many of the practices and beliefs continue to the present, as he has observed in field studies in Oklahoma.

Creek sociopolitical organization included a local chiefdom (italwa), headed by a hereditary chief (mikko). These local chiefdoms were subsumed into larger, regional chiefdoms under a paramount chief. Crosscutting Creek society were exogamous clans and phratries, grouped into moiety that tended to be endogamous within italwa. Clans were headed by male elders (achtulaki), but most other leadership positions were held by members of the mikko’s clan or dispensed by this clan to others as patronage. Of the thirty-four clans, only three (that of the mikko and two others) held the majority of offices; these clans, then, formed an elite. Heredity, through clan membership, thus was an important factor in determining who was of elite status in Muskogee society, although some offices, particularly in the war organization, could be achieved through individual accomplishment. Furthermore, women did not hold political
office or serve as clan heads and thus lacked direct, formal access to power. In general, women in Creek society were not viewed by men as valued political advisors (Sattler 1995).

Elite status in Cherokee society was much less dependent upon ascription. With the exception of the position of town chief (uku), which was clan-specific, increased rank of individuals was based mainly on achievement, including an individual's age. Cherokee towns were more autonomous than the Creek italua. Households and lineages represented seven exogamous, matrilineal clans which were not ranked relative to each other, but the clan of the uku may have been slightly superior. Senior women of the clans held positions of "Beloved Women" and had considerable influence in beginning or ending wars and in the fate of prisoners; their counsel was highly valued by the male leaders (Sattler 1995).

According to Sattler (1995), a major difference in Cherokee women's power, as compared with Muskogeans, was that Cherokee women maintained control of agricultural production. Although fields were "owned" by the matrilineal clans in both groups, Creek women in the historic period farmed only small garden plots near the houses, while the men worked larger fields away from the settlements and controlled the resulting produce. In contrast, Cherokee women controlled both the land and the produce.

Economic roles of women are directly related to female rank, so much so that some researchers view economics as a primary variable affecting female status (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988). Sattler (1995) points out that since generosity is a requisite of high rank and political power, control of agricultural produce was an important means for Muskogee men to wield political influence. Such control also would have been a factor in Cherokee women's relatively high level of political influence. Marxist theorists link control over the means of production to increased power and status of women (Leacock 1981).

The most important aspect of Sattler's work for archaeological interpretations is that it shows that we should expect neither that men and women had equivalent roles nor that women had equal power in all southeastern groups. Within and among different groups, there likely were different venues for men and women to become politically influential, exert power, and achieve prestige. Also, the range of statuses and political influence available to women was not necessarily the same in every subregion or cultural context. In short, the archaeological presumption that the predominance of male burials in Mississippian mounds always denotes male political dominance is too simplistic to fit the potential range of variation indicated by the ethnographic record.

**Mortuary Practices and Mississippian Sociopolitics**

Until recently, most studies of the social dimensions of mortuary practices focused on ascertaining aspects of hierarchical relationships. Delineating the degree to which ascription defined elite status was an important research objective for initial studies of Mississippian mortuary programs (J. A. Brown 1971; Goldstein 1980; Hatch 1974, 1976; Peebles 1974) as researchers sought to understand the archaeological correlates of chiefdoms and institutionalized authority (Peebles and Kus 1977). The individuals interred in and around mounds, often with elaborate arrays of funerary objects, were recognized as the archaeological manifestation of chiefly elites. These individuals became the focus of attention because they were the potential "redistributors," ideologues, faction leaders, and controllers of sumptuary goods, trade, and/or surplus, among other possible venues of political power and prestige.

The demographics of elite burials are an important consideration in determining whether heredity was a significant criterion for elite status. The presence of infants and young children in elite burials programs is prima facie evidence of inherited status, since these individuals would not have been able to achieve high status based on their own abilities (J. A. Brown 1981). James Brown (1981:30) also points out that "any statistically significant departure from a 'normal' age/sex curve points to differential recruitment of a particular age and sex category into specific status groups." Many burial populations associated with Mississippian mounds include some women and children, but predominantly comprise adult males. Such demographics are interpreted as indicating that heredity was a factor in gaining elite status, due to the presence of women and children, but not the only factor. Achievement of elite status apparently also was an option, and accounts for the "extra" males in elite burial programs (see, for example, Peebles 1974). Why this option was open only to males is a topic that is not addressed in the literature.

Models of Mississippian sociopolitics thus typically propose elite status as being based on a combination of heredity and achievement. High rank was a privilege of birth for a small segment of a population and consequently included women and children as well as adult males. Persons outside of this kin group also could attain elite status through personal achievement. This latter venue presumably was open mainly to
adult males. These models of Mississippian society pose adult males as the wielders of political power because they are the predominant members of the identified elite groups; they are buried in mounds. These interpretations fit well with the accounts of early European explorers who describe, with very few exceptions, male chiefs, councilors, war leaders, and statesmen as the leaders of southeastern groups (Feinman and Neitzel 1984). Viewed along this particular axis, men do indeed appear to dominate the social and political hierarchies of Mississippian societies, but this view may well be one through the blinders of our Eurocentric notions of "public" and "domestic."

As we have seen from cross-cultural information, the reason men predominate in this public dimension may well be that it is a gendered dimension. Ethnohistoric information from the Southeast suggests that one possible venue through which women were empowered politically was as leaders of "horizontal" social dimensions, such as households, kin groups, or clans. The search for horizontal social dimensions in mortuary practices has proved a more difficult objective than identifying the "vertical" dimension of rank (O’Shea 1984). O’Shea (1984) provides a detailed discussion, but basically the problem is that markers for such groups are not readily identifiable in the archaeological record. This problem may further add to the invisibility of women as active players on the political landscape.

While we cannot readily identify clan groups in southeastern mortuary populations, we can look more closely at mortuary programs for gender dimensions. One assumption of modern archaeological analyses of mortuary practices is that the social persona, or overall status composite of an individual, is symbolized in funerary behavior (J. A. Brown 1981:28). Gender obviously is one component of a social persona. Bivariate analyses of artifact associations with the biological sex of skeletons often are used to identify suites of artifacts that correlate with males as opposed to females. One must be careful to distinguish between biological sex and the culturally constructed concept of gender (Miller 1993:4-7; Nelson 1997:15), but for the majority of a population, gender roles do tend to correlate with an individual’s biological sex. General inferences about cultural constructions of gender in prehistory thus can be made by examining patterning in mortuary treatments as it pertains to biological sex.

From the cross-cultural and ethnohistoric evidence discussed above, we can pose several hypotheses about prestigious and politically influential women in late prehistoric chiefdoms of the Southeast. First, if women generally were on a "slow track" in terms of achievement of prestige—as compared with men, whose warrior experience allowed them to increase their status at an earlier age—mortuary treatments for males and females should show differences that correlate with age. Although increased age should signal increased prestige for both sexes, male burials should show evidence that men generally gained prestige at an earlier age than women. This patterning would not preclude the possibility that some women achieved higher rank at an earlier age by participating in other activities, nor would it preclude both males and females having access to elite status because of inheritance.

A corollary to such a trend pertains to older females in a population. Based on the ethnohistoric models, in those native southeastern societies in which women have considerable political power, the most prestigious and powerful women are the matriarchs, who served as heads of households, and the senior women of matrilineal clans. Older adult women are the likeliest candidates for matriarch status because they have had the most time to develop their power bases and to outlive potential rivals. The mortuary treatments of older women are likely to differ from those of their male cohort but should flag these women as prestigious individuals, perhaps of rank equal to older men. In other words, if women gained prestige on a different "track" than men, it is quite possible that by the time women reached maturity, the prestige differences with men may have evened out.

Differences in the public versus domestic spheres of males and females also may have influenced the mortuary practices for the genders. The concern of Mississippian peoples with spatial arrangements is well-known (see, for example, Goldstein 1980; Knight 1998; Sullivan 1987). Hudson (1976:260) notes that spatial segregation was a component of gender relations in many southeastern groups: "men and women kept themselves separate from each other to a very great extent. . . . They seem, in fact, to have preferred to carry out their day-to-day activities apart from each other. During the day the women worked with each other around their households, while the men resorted to their town house or square ground." At council meetings, a great deal of attention was paid to the seating arrangement of the various social and political positions (Gearing 1962:24; Hudson 1976:203-20; Swanton 1946:174-241). Spatial distinctions in burial locations for the genders could "mask" prestigious women, because mounds and public areas are presumed to be the most prestigious places of interment for both sexes regardless of how prestige
was earned. Different patterns of burial location for “elders” of both sexes may indicate differences in how prestige is symbolized for members of different gender groups.

Rodning’s (1999a) study of Qualla phase mortuary practices demonstrates that such research, when attuned to the potential of separate gender dimensions, can recognize women as active players in a sociopolitical landscape. The Qualla phase of the Appalachian Summit is assumed by many archaeologists to represent the archaeological record of the Cherokee in that area from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Rodning’s (1999a) analysis of mortuary practices at the Coweea Creek site shows differential patterning based on the biological sex of skeletons. Burials associated with a large public structure (i.e. a communal, nonresidential structure or “townhouse”) are predominantly adult males, while the majority of women are buried in association with houses. Differences in grave associations between the sexes mainly are of kind rather than quality, although there are males in the townhouse group and adult females in the village who are interred with distinctive suites of objects.

Rodning (1999a) interprets these patterns as representing the male and female roles of town and clan leaders, respectively. The locations of the burials correlate with the architecture that represents these two dimensions of community political leadership: the townhouse, which represents the Cherokee “male” domain of town leadership in the realms of trade, diplomacy, warfare, and ceremony; and the households, which represent the Cherokee “female” domain of kinship groups and, in particular, clan leadership. Males and females gained prestige and the ability to affect political decision making through these different venues, and, as Rodning (1996) notes, “these alternative avenues... would have complemented each other rather than representing vertically differentiated dimensions of a social hierarchy.”

The Chota-Tanasee site, a Cherokee town in the Little Tennessee River Valley dating to the eighteenth century (Schroedl 1986b), also shows similar mortuary patterns (Rodning 1996; Schroedl and Breitburg 1986; Sullivan 1995). Although after European contact the Little Tennessee River Valley was home to the Overhill Cherokee, the relationship of the prehistoric and protohistoric Mississippian occupants of this valley (and, indeed, the rest of the Upper Tennessee River Valley) to the Cherokee is a long-debated issue (Schroedl 1986a). My intent is not to enter into this debate here but instead to examine whether the political status of women in the Mississippian societies of this area is more similar to the ethnographic model offered by the Cherokee or to that of the Muskogee, based on the work of Sattler (1995) and Rodning (1996). We turn to the Mississippian-period, Dallas phase of the upper Tennessee River Valley to examine these ideas.

The East Tennessee Case

The Dallas phase, originally defined by Thomas Lewis and Madeline Kneberg (1946; T. M. N. Lewis, Kneberg Lewis, and Sullivan 1995), is the major Mississippian complex in the upper Tennessee River Valley and dates to A.D. 1300-1600 (Schroedl, Boyd, and Davis 1990). Much of the current thinking about Dallas phase sociopolitical organization rests on Hatch’s (1974) regional study of Dallas mortuary practices, which used data from nineteen sites. Hatch (1974:112-13) noted gender-specific differences in burial locations and the kinds of artifacts associated with the sexes, which led him to “hypothesize the general tendency in Dallas sites for adult males to be of a different status than are females of all ages.” His study found significant correlations of mound interment with adult males. Burials also occur in village contexts, and the majority of individuals interred in these contexts are female. Hatch posited that these differences had to do with differing statuses of men and women, but he did not further explore the nature of these differences (nor, in some cases, would the data have been sufficient to do so). Hatch assumed, like most other researchers examining hierarchical organization in Mississippian chieftoms, that the data indicate that men mostly outranked women.

After Hatch’s study, research was completed at the Toqua site, a Dallas town in the Little Tennessee River Valley with two mounds. The occupation of the Toqua site spans the entire Dallas phase (Lengel, Eighmy, and Sullivan 1999). A mid-eighteenth-century Cherokee component also is present at the site. Scott and Polhemus’s (1987) study of the social dimensions of Dallas mortuary practices at Toqua produced similar results to those of Hatch, in that the majority of the mound population consists of adult males, several of whom were interred with large sets of prestige goods. They propose that “while there is an indication of ascribed status at Toqua, this is not a dominant means of social ranking. Status at Toqua has both ascribed and achieved characteristics which appear to exist simultaneously” (Scott and Polhemus 1987:398-99). They also offer this intriguing observation: “Although there is no clear evidence of a paramount chief at Toqua, there is a group of high status individuals within the site. . . . [The mortuary program suggests] a model of two social levels comprised of high status lineage elders and commoners. The presence of an apical class of adult males in the mounds was not
uniquely set apart from females or other high status burials in the village” (Scott and Polhemus 1987:397–98).

A complete reexamination of the Dallas mortuary data is beyond the scope of this chapter, but we can look more closely at the data from one site, Toqua, to investigate differences in women’s and men’s statuses. A cautionary note about this preliminary analysis is that it is necessary, for the sake of sample size, to treat the Dallas phase occupation at Toqua as a static unit. Changes in statuses of the genders undoubtedly occurred over the several-hundred-year span of this phase. The research results thus show only very general patterns.

**Mortuary Patterns and Gender at the Toqua Site**

Parham’s (1987) demographic study of the Toqua skeletal series provides relevant information. The Toqua sample includes 439 individuals from the Dallas phase. Male life expectancy was slightly longer than that of females: 20.80 years, as opposed to 18.62 years. Female mortality increased between ages fifteen and twenty-five and that of males between twenty and twenty-five (fig. 5.1a). Parham (1987:443) attributes the increase in female mortality to childbearing and notes that the twenty to twenty-five age bracket for males may represent “prime years for participation in warfare and hunting activities.” After age thirty, life expectancies for the sexes are parallel (fig. 5.1b).

Parham (1987) assumed that the mound population represents the highest-status individuals at Toqua and compared the age and gender distributions of the skeletal populations in the mounds to those in the village. He found that the mortality rate for younger males (under age thirty) in the Toqua mounds is considerably higher than that of the male village burials. He suggests this difference may be due to greater participation in hunting and warfare by those males in the mound population. Such skills would have allowed these males to achieve sufficient prestige for mound interment.

Parham also found that mortality was considerably higher for younger females (under age twenty) in the mound population than for those in the village. He interprets these differences as implying that high-status females (i.e., those interred in the mound) were marrying younger than their lower-status (i.e., village) counterparts and encountering greater difficulties in childbirth due to their younger age. He (Parham 1987: 548) further relates the apparent shorter life span of the mound females, as compared with the males, to the possible sacrifice of these younger women upon the death of their high-status husbands—an idea based on Blakely’s (1977) work.

![Fig. 5.1. Demographics of the Toqua burial population (from Parham 1987:447–51).](image)

Parham’s analysis is a classic example of what Nelson (1997:133) calls the “double standard” in archaeological interpretation—a mindset that causes a male in a “rich” burial to be interpreted as a leader, while an equally prominent female burial is seen as a leader’s wife. The differences Parham observed in age-group representations in the Toqua mounds and village can be interpreted in another way: The distributions of male and female burials in the mound and village may well relate to the different life trajectories of men and women and the different ways in which they achieved prestige.

Simple comparisons of age cohorts by burial locations (mound versus
village) and sex show patterns similar to those observed by Parham (figs. 5.2 and 5.3) and illustrate important differences in the distributions of males and females. Data are drawn from Polhemus (1987: appendix D). Of the total adult population (older than fifteen years) that could be assigned both sex and age (n = 150), fifty-three individuals (35 percent) were interred in the mounds. Thirty-three individuals (62 percent) in the mound population are male, and twenty (38 percent) are female.

Young males (ages twenty to twenty-nine) are the most likely candidates for mound burial. The percentages of male individuals interred in mounds steadily rise from age fifteen through twenty-nine (fig. 5.2). After a peak in mound interment at age twenty-five to twenty-nine, the percentages of males buried in the mound decrease until the oldest age bracket (forty and above), when the percentage of males buried in the mound again rises. The pattern of age representation for females in the mound is quite different. In sharp contrast to the male pattern, the percentages of females in the age fifteen through twenty-nine brackets steadily decrease, then increase for females in their early thirties. The percentage of females between the ages of thirty-five and thirty-nine buried in the mound equals that of men. But the eldest females, those age forty and older, are not represented in the mound at all.

The patterns for village interments mirror those of the mounds (fig. 5.3). Very young males (ages fifteen to nineteen), women in their late twenties, males and females in their late thirties, and women over forty are the most likely candidates for village burial. Individuals of both sexes aged thirty to thirty-four years more often were buried in the village than in the mounds, but the representation of males and females is nearly equal in both burial locations. All females in the age forty and older cohort are interred in the village.

As Parham suggests, a possible explanation for the increasing representation of young adult males in the mounds is their participation in the war organization. Being a warrior in nearly every southeastern society earned men prestige at relatively young ages. A "benefit" of such prestige could well have been mound interment. If females did not have the same access to this method of prestige enhancement, it makes sense that their representation in the mounds would not increase during the young adult years.

The representation of older men in the mounds may relate to the transition from warrior to roles of older men. Gearing (1962) discusses such a transition among the Cherokee and points out that few men were equally competent warriors and statesmen. It would take time for those men

![Fig. 5.2. Adult mound interments at Toqua by age cohort and sex.](image)

![Fig. 5.3. Adult village interments at Toqua by age cohort and sex.](image)
having the latter qualities to become recognized as such. Perhaps the relatively low percentages of men in their thirties who merited mound burial may reflect this phenomenon. Those who had appropriate talents as elders were recognized in death with mound burial.

If we were to rely strictly on mound burial as an indicator of prestige, we would have to conclude that women in the Toqua population actually lost prestige with age. Except for a rise in representation of the early thirties age group, over all, female representation in the mounds declines with age. This pattern is exactly the opposite of what one would expect if mound burial had equal meaning for both men and women. After a marked increase in the early thirties, female representation in the mound declines, with none of the eldest women in the population receiving mound burial.

As Scott and Polhemus (1987) note, there is evidence at Toqua (as in most Mississippian burial populations) that achievement-based prestige is entwined with inheritance of social rank and corresponding prestige. The presence of young children and infants in the Toqua mound population attests to ascription as a factor in determining rank (J. A. Brown 1981). Interment of young females in the mound probably has more to do with their inherited status than with their own accomplishments, as they would not have had time to achieve increased rank. But why are the oldest females in the population not buried in the mounds? Based on cross-cultural and ethnographic research, these “grandmothers” of the community should be among its most accomplished and beloved members and the women most likely to be politically influential. If we rely on mound burial as the sole symbol of “elite status,” with its corresponding connotations for power and influence, the eldest women are eliminated from consideration as high status.

An additional data set that relates to individual prestige as symbolized in mortuary practices—presence of funerary objects—suggests another interpretation. Funerary objects reflect gestures of the living toward the deceased. A tenet of studies of mortuary practices is that, in general, a prestigious individual will have more energy expended on his/her grave than a non-or less-prestigious person. Such “energy” may take the form of amount of disposed wealth (J. A. Brown 1995). The presence of funerary objects thus signifies a more prestigious individual than someone with no such offerings (although in archaeological contexts the possibility of perishable items as grave associations must be kept in mind).

A graph depicting the percentage of individuals with at least one funerary object in each adult age cohort shows that the percentage of females buried with objects steadily increases from age fifteen through thirty (fig. 5.4). At the same time that younger adult women are being excluded from mound interment, they are becoming more and more likely to be buried in the village with some type of grave offering. The percentage of males interred with at least one object also rises with age, but not as sharply as for women (fig. 5.4). During the male “role transition” period of the fourth decade of life, the percentage of males buried with objects does not increase at the same rate as that of the women. Both sexes show a marked drop in percentages interred with objects in the oldest age bracket, an interesting phenomenon that is investigated further below.

Taken together, these trends point to an alternate burial program for women—burial in the village in the location of their houses—as they become older and presumably increasingly responsible for managing households (fig. 5.5). Mound interment for men is consistent with an increase in prestige during the younger adult years, when males would have been active in the war organization (fig. 5.6). In fact, it is males of this age group who are the main source of the discrepancy between male

Fig. 5.4. Adult individuals associated with funerary objects at Toqua by age cohorts and sex.
and female representation in the mounds. After age thirty, there is much less difference in the representation of the sexes in the mounds, with the exception of the very oldest members of the population. The general trend is for women to be less likely candidates for mound burial as they age. This trend does not correlate with decreased likelihood of being buried with grave offerings. These patterns suggest that village burial for women does not necessarily correlate with decreased prestige or social standing. In fact, burial in a house may be as much of a material “accommodation” for a female as are some symbolically charged objects interred with males.

The existence of a separate mortuary program for women does not, in and of itself, indicate that women were in positions to influence the political decisions of men. However, it does show that mortuary programs at Toqua are indeed gendered, and that the spatial dimensions of these programs correlate with the spheres of influence and life trajectories we would expect for men and women based on cross-cultural comparisons and ethnographic analogy with historic southeastern groups. We cannot assume that women had little or no political power simply because they are not well represented in mounds. On the other hand, most females and

many males were buried in household contexts. Males interred in the “female” sphere of the household presumably were not of appropriate status or rank to be interred in a mound, if mound burial indeed mainly symbolizes male leadership. We can hypothesize that if there were female leaders at the Toqua site and their appropriate places of interment were in the houses that represent the kin groups they led, we can expect differentiation in mortuary treatments among females in house contexts. That is, not all older females likely were leaders, nor were all female leaders treated in similar ways. The degree of differentiation would be comparable to that observed among the males in the mound (i.e., male “leaders”) and those in the village (i.e., male “nonleaders”).

In order to explore this idea more thoroughly, we will examine one age cohort in detail. This group is the oldest, age forty and above. This cohort is particularly interesting because there is a dichotomy of the sexes in burial location and because the percentages of individuals interred with funerary objects, for both sexes, distinctly decrease. Data on mortuary treatments are available for seventeen individuals: eleven males and six females (Polhemus 1987). These individuals represent 11 percent of the total adult population (over fifteen years of age) for which sex, age, and

Fig. 5.5. Locations of graves of adult females at Toqua by age cohort.

Fig. 5.6. Locations of graves of adult males at Toqua by age cohort.
mortuary treatments could be determined (n = 150). Four individuals (24 percent) of the over-forty group were buried in the mound. All are male. Viewed in another way, 36 percent of the oldest males are interred in the mound, 64 percent of these males are buried in the village, and 100 percent of the females are interred in the village. Mound interment obviously was not an appropriate mortuary treatment for elderly females at Toqua. In contrast, mound burial was suitable for about one-third of the elderly males.

The associations of funerary objects with the elderly group indicate differentiation within this cohort, but there is little difference between the sexes as to presence or absence of funerary objects. Some individuals of each sex were treated differently from others. Five of the males (45 percent) and three of the females (50 percent) were interred with objects, suggesting that this aspect of the mortuary program was not appropriate for everyone. Of the four elderly males in the mound, two (50 percent) were interred with objects, as compared with three (43 percent) of the seven elderly males in the village. The females with grave associations were, of course, all in the village.

The kinds of objects interred with the dead do show considerable differences between the sexes (table 5.1). Most of the objects appear to relate to the division of labor: The males have woodworking tools (celts and adzes—some are “ceremonial” as opposed to usable for woodworking), hunting and/or war implements (projectile points and possibly paint—graphite), a pipe, and a few miscellaneous tools and objects of personal adornment, including marine shell beads and an ear pin. The women have culinary tools (pots and mussel-shell spoons), some miscellaneous tools and jewelry (marine-shell ear pins, beads, and a gorget), and some animal bones which may represent either food offerings or special “bundles” (see below). The males, on average, have 1.82 kinds of items each, with the four in the mound averaging 2.75 kinds of objects and the seven in the village averaging 1.29 objects. In contrast, the females average three kinds of items, comparable to the men in the mound.

The mortuary treatments of this elderly cohort indicate differentiation among individuals as well as between the sexes, but the differences between the sexes do not appear to relate to prestige or rank. The mortuary treatments of the more prestigious females in this group (i.e., those with funerary objects) are comparable to those of the prestigious males (i.e., those men in the mounds). If the oldest males in the mounds at Toqua were leaders in the male sphere of public politics, it is just as likely that three of the oldest females interred in their houses were leaders in the female sphere of matrilineal kin groups and matriloclal households.

### Table 5.1. Mortuary goods from Toqua associated with individuals over the age of forty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burial number</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Burial location</th>
<th>Mortuary goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>mound</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63b</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>mound</td>
<td>none, projectile points, celt, shell beads, graphite, mica, bone spear point, worked bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>mound</td>
<td>celt, shell beads, shell pin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>mound</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>celt, pipe, adze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>243</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>celt, pipe, adze, projectile points, biface, bone bead, flakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>372</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>bone bead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>419</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>shell spoon, pottery jars, shell beads, freshwater shells, small animal bones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>440</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>bone bead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>shell bead, pottery jars, shell pins, niad, deer and bird bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>shell bead, pottery jars, shell pins, niad, deer and bird bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>263</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>413</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>416</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>shell pin, projectile point, niad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Powerful Women and Chiefly Politics

The data from east Tennessee suggest that in examining and interpreting prestige and political power as symbolized in Mississippian mortuary practices in this particular region, we have fallen into our own cultural trap. Since women mainly are buried in “domestic” space, and more men are buried in “public” space than are women, we took these data to mean that women were inferior in prestige and power. These interpretations are too simplistic and are devoid of appropriate cultural context.

Gendered life cycles and division of labor and gendered burial programs can account for most of the perceived “inferiority” of women in the Toqua data set. Mounds, with their public political connotations,
symbolize the male sphere of community leadership and foreign relations. In contrast, the houses represent the female sphere of everyday life, family, and kin. These complementary spheres of men and women involve different social institutions: individual settlements and/or localities (towns), on one hand, and kinship groups that cross-cut communities, on the other.

The simple existence of gendered spheres implies neither political dominance nor equality. Further analyses employing thoughtful comparisons along gender axes could suggest patterns of control and/or reciprocity pertaining to resources, social groupings, and/or ideology. The preliminary comparisons offered here using the Toqua data suggest no clear patterns of political dominance along gender lines. There is a link between inherited status and town leadership, reflected in the presence of children and young females in the mound-burial population, but the most prevalent means of attaining high social rank appears to be through individual achievement. The most likely venue for the majority of the adult males in the mounds to achieve prestige worthy of mound burial was through their prowess as warriors and statesmen. Most of the females in the mound may well be there due to inherited status, but a cadre of women also gained increased status through achievement. These latter women are represented in house burials, which likely are distinguished archaeologically by associated funerary objects with contexts and meanings we do not yet understand.

The gender patterns observed in the Toqua data are strikingly similar to those observed by Rodning (1996, 1999a) for Cherokee town sites and are not incompatible with Sattler’s (1995) characterization of eighteenth-century Cherokee sociopolitical organization. Female leaders, as senior members of clans, were very influential in Cherokee politics. It is appropriate that such women were interred in household contexts, because their prestige and political influence in these matrilineal societies derived from, and was based in, the social context of households and kin groups. Mortuary practices at the Ledford Island site, a Mouse Creek phase (Late Mississippian/protohistoric) town in the Hiwassee River Valley of southeastern Tennessee, exhibits similar patterns (Sullivan 1986, 1987, 1995), but the poor bone preservation precludes age definitions of most individuals in the “public” plaza cemetery.

As noted above, during late prehistory many small chiefly polities dotted the landscape in eastern Tennessee. The Toqua site likely was the center of one such polity (Polhemus 1987). Mississippian polities in eastern Tennessee never or perhaps only very briefly coalesced into a large, centralized chiefdom (Hally 1994b; Hally, Smith, and Langford 1990). If they did so at all, it was perhaps in response to influence from Lamar-tradition centralized chiefdoms to the south (see Williams and Shapiro 1990).

Mortuary practices at “Lamar” sites on the Savannah River are summarized by Anderson (1996:188) as follows: “Proportionally far more females than males were found in the village areas than the mounds, and the burials in the village area typically had a much lower incidence of grave goods. Mound burial appears to have been restricted to high-status adults, typically males.” If we were to look again at Lamar mortuary data, would we find patterns similar to Toqua? What about moundville, Etowah, or Cahokia? Would the Cherokee model compare favorably with these data sets, or would perhaps the Muskogee model offered by Sattler (1995) be more compatible?

Do the upper Tennessee River Valley and adjacent Appalachian Summit regions differ from other southeastern subregions by virtue of maintaining a long tradition of active political influence by women? Such a balance of power with male leadership (including the war organization) would be a significant factor in the sociopolitical dynamics of this subregion. As Sattler (1995:229) notes, “complementarity of the roles and statuses [of the genders] implies very different relations of power and mechanisms for its acquisition and expression than does structural inequality and subordination.” The implications for gendered politics and how such engendered spheres of influence may relate to factionalism, resource control and allocation, and other aspects of how power was manipulated are fascinating to consider. Perhaps those men in the mounds thought so, too.

Author’s Note

Thanks go to Jane Eastman and Chris Rodning for inviting me to participate in this publication project, for their helpful comments on the various drafts, and their patience and good humor as I missed deadlines. I am very grateful to Tim Pauketat and Vin Steponaitis for listening to my ideas while they were even more half-baked, and to Tim for providing very useful comments on the draft manuscript. Although these colleagues greatly improved the quality of the paper, they are not to be blamed for its failings. Those belong to me.
Notes

1. Marine-shell pins are associated with two of the elderly females with funerary objects (Burials 217 and 416). The third (Burial 169) had in association two collections of objects, including various animal bones, which were “concentrated behind the back in two clusters which may represent bags or other containers. Such collections are found associated with several other burials at Toqua and appear to be restricted to older females” (Scott and Polhemus 1987:420).

Piedmont Siouans and Mortuary Archaeology on the Eno River, North Carolina

Elizabeth Monahan Driscoll, R. P. Stephen Davis Jr., and H. Trawick Ward

Gender was a meaningful aspect of past mortuary ritual, and interpreting gender in archaeologically visible mortuary patterns demands more than knowledge about the biological sex and age at death of interred individuals. Gender roles are often actively created, negotiated, and reinforced through mortuary ritual. By examining the material remains of burials and individuals and evidence of other aspects of burial ritual, archaeologists can learn a great deal about the gender roles within past communities. This chapter reviews mortuary patterns at the Fiedricks site, the early eighteenth-century settlement of Occanechee Town, located in the Piedmont of North Carolina. The people who occupied Occanechee Town were under considerable stress from European-introduced diseases, and they were also recently dislocated from their previous homes in Virginia. Historic records indicate that several disparate groups came together in the Piedmont at the time the site was occupied, due to their diminishing numbers and increasingly embattled existence. We examined mortuary patterns at the site with an eye toward discerning possible cultural differences among the burials, especially in the realm of gender.

The Fiedricks site was discovered in 1983 by archaeologists from the University of North Carolina’s (UNC) Research Laboratories of Archaeology and was excavated between 1983 and 1986 (fig. 6.1). It represents
Archeological Studies of Gender in the Southeastern United States

Edited by Jane M. Eastman and Christopher B. Rodning
Foreword by Jerald T. Milanich, Series Editor

2001
University Press of Florida
Gainesville · Tallahassee · Tampa · Boca Raton
Pensacola · Orlando · Miami · Jacksonville · Ft. Myers