

# Reconsidering Mississippian Communities and Households

Edited by  
**Elizabeth Watts Malouchos**  
and **Alleen Betzenhauser**

Foreword by **Gregory D. Wilson**

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Published in 1995, *Mississippian Communities and Households*, edited by J. Daniel Rogers and Bruce D. Smith, was a foundational text that advanced southeastern archaeology in significant ways and brought household-level archaeology to the forefront of the field. *Reconsidering Mississippian Communities and Households* revisits and builds on what has been learned in the years since the Rogers and Smith volume, advancing the field further with the diverse perspectives of current social theory and methods and big data as applied to communities in Native America from the AD 900s to 1700s and from northeast Florida to southwest Arkansas.

Watts Malouchos and Betzenhauser bring together scholars researching diverse Mississippian Southeast and Midwest sites to investigate aspects of community and household construction, maintenance, and dissolution. Thirteen original case studies prove that community can be enacted and expressed in various ways, including in feasting, pottery styles, war and conflict, and mortuary treatments.

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Cover image: Mississippian community plan at the Pfeffer site; rendering by Elizabeth Watts Malouchos, with data courtesy of the Illinois State Archaeological Survey

Cover design: Lori Lynch

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*"Reconsidering Mississippian Communities and Households successfully updates its namesake, Rogers and Smith's 1995 Mississippian Communities and Households. It will certainly find a wide readership among those interested in social archaeology by bringing together established scholars and up-and-comers in a democratizing publication."*

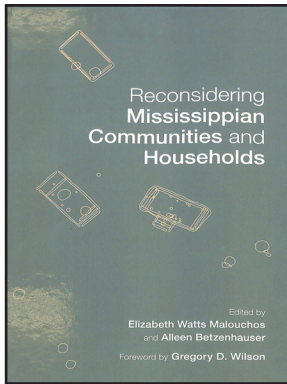
—Ramie A. Gougeon, coeditor  
of *Archaeological Perspectives  
on the Southern Appalachians:  
A Multiscalar Approach*

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## Reconsidering Mississippian Communities and Households

Elizabeth Watts Malouchos and Alleen Betzenhauser, Eds. 2021. *Archaeology of the American South Series*, [University of Alabama Press](https://www.ua.edu/press/). x+240 pp., 33 figures, 12 maps, 8 tables, references. \$64.95 (Hardcover), \$64.95 (E Book)

*Reviewed by Alice P. Wright, Department of Anthropology, Appalachian State University*

Nearly three decades have passed since the publication of J. Daniel Rogers and Bruce D. Smith's seminal volume *Mississippian Communities and Households* (1995). In that time, southeastern archaeologists have embraced new field methods, analytical frameworks, and theoretical perspectives with the potential to shed new light on Native American social formations during the centuries before and immediately following European contact. *Reconsidering Mississippian Communities and Households*, edited by Elizabeth Watts Malouchos and Alleen Betzenhauser of the Illinois State Archaeological Survey, highlights a wide range of studies that expand upon Rogers and Smith's foundational work and demonstrates the vibrance of contemporary research on Mississippian societies.

Consisting of thirteen original research chapters, a concise introduction, and a thoughtful discussion from Mesoamericanist Jason Yaeger, this volume encompasses the entire chronological scope the Mississippian period, from its beginnings at the turn of the second millennium AD through its echoes in the historic era. It also covers a commendably broad geographic area; chapters that focus on specific sites or clusters of sites (as opposed to broad regional trends, e.g. Benjamin A. Steere's impressive synthesis of Mississippian architecture in Chapter 5) highlight findings from Alabama (Chapter 12), Arkansas (Chapter 3), Florida (Chapter 11), Georgia (Chapters 8, 13), Illinois (Chapters 2, 7, 9), Mississippi (Chapter 4), and North Carolina (Chapters 6, 10). Notably, each of these case studies included summary details of a site's or area's setting, culture history, and history of research, often complemented by clear maps. For an archaeological audience familiar with the broad brushstrokes of Mississippian history but unfamiliar with the particulars of specific locales, this background provided critical context and a truly accessible reading experience.

This temporal and areal breadth is one of the volume's greatest strengths. Even as it calls attention to certain common practices and processes that unfolded across the Mississippian world, it also underscores that no two Mississippian records are exactly alike and that Mississippian peoples adopted diverse and dynamic social strategies across space and through time. In this regard, the editors' and authors' commitment to a broadly historical processual theoretical framework stands as a significant update to the 1995 volume on roughly the same subject matter.

The topical breadth of the chapters is equally impressive, though perhaps a bit challenging. Contributors tackle Mississippian households and communities through analyses of pottery, storage pits, house architecture, palisades, cemeteries, mounds, crafts, and more,

and based on these data, each contribution does illuminate the Mississippian households and communities under consideration. That said, a cover-to-cover read makes it hard to discern if there are any distinctive elements that distinguish an archaeology of Mississippian households and communities from Mississippian archaeology as a whole. This is not so much a critique of the approach taken by the editors (which they clearly and reasonably explain in their introduction), but rather an advance warning for readers to buckle up—they are about to cover a lot of ground! Upon reflection, I do think this approach is the right one, even if it is slightly overwhelming from an analytical perspective. It moves us closer to a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness of Mississippian social, political, economic, and spiritual experiences at multiple scales, in keeping with important recent calls for the adoption of relational perspectives in archaeology.

While all the chapters in the volume present compelling data and interpretations, a few stand out. Chapter 2 by Malouchos, “Reconsidering Mississippian Communities and Households in Context,” is a thoroughly referenced, comprehensive overview of the history of archaeological thought on households and communities. Malouchos has done every researcher interested in these topics a huge favor by compiling this intellectual history into one easy-to-read chapter; it would be a terrific addition to archaeology syllabi at the advanced undergraduate or graduate level.

Other chapters find strong footing by explicitly embracing more recently articulated approaches to households and communities. For example, in their chapters, Meghan E. Buchanan and Melissa R. Baltus, Adam King, and Keith Ashley focus not on communities based on co-residence (long recognized to be an overly narrow definition), but rather on variably materialized communities of practice. This framework encourages considerations of social identity and affiliation between sites and across regions, which in turn, render processes of mobility, migration, and abandonment archaeologically accessible. Another exciting move is adopted by Erin S. Nelson in her interpretation of Parchman Place in Mississippi, and by Christopher B. Rodning and Amber R. Thorpe in their interpretation of Coweeta Creek in North Carolina. These authors rely heavily on the ethnographic records and oral traditions of descendant Native American communities to interpret the archaeological data from these sites, and their efforts clearly demonstrate how much contextual information stands to be gleaned from this approach. I look forward to future research on Mississippian households and communities in this vein, because I think it will help clarify the challenge discussed above—namely, that the relationships that define and are defined by Mississippian households and communities are simultaneously economic, social, political, and spiritual, and this complexity is difficult to parse using archaeological data alone.

In sum, *Reconsidering Mississippian Communities and Households* offers a diverse range of approaches to the archaeological record of Mississippian societies, respectfully building on a decades-long tradition of research in this area while charting an updated research trajectory for the 21st century. It should appeal many Eastern Woodlands researchers, regardless of geographic and temporal specialization, particularly those

interested in multi-scalar approaches, social identity, and practice-based considerations of the archaeological record.

## **Reference**

Rogers, J. Daniel and Bruce D. Smith (1995) *Mississippian Communities and Households*. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.