LIVING WITH WAR: THE IMPACT OF CHRONIC VIOLENCE IN THE MISSISSIPPIAN-PERIOD CENTRAL ILLINOIS RIVER VALLEY

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THE Central Illinois River Valley (CIRV) of west-central Illinois has a complex history of migration and culture contact that was strongly affected by violence (Conrad 1991; Esarey and Conrad 1998; Milner et al. 1991; Steadman 2001). Located on the northern periphery of the Mississippian cultural area, the CIRV has the potential to transform our understanding of the impact and outcomes of inter-group violence in middle-range societies (Figures 43.1 and 43.2). In this chapter, I argue that changing patterns of violence substantially altered the lives of those who lived in this region. To make my case I discuss archaeological patterns of violence from four different periods of the late Prehistoric era: the terminal late Woodland period (AD 700 to 1100), the early Mississippian period (AD 1100 to 1250), the middle Mississippian Period (AD 1250 to 1300), and the late Mississippian period (AD 1300 to 1440).
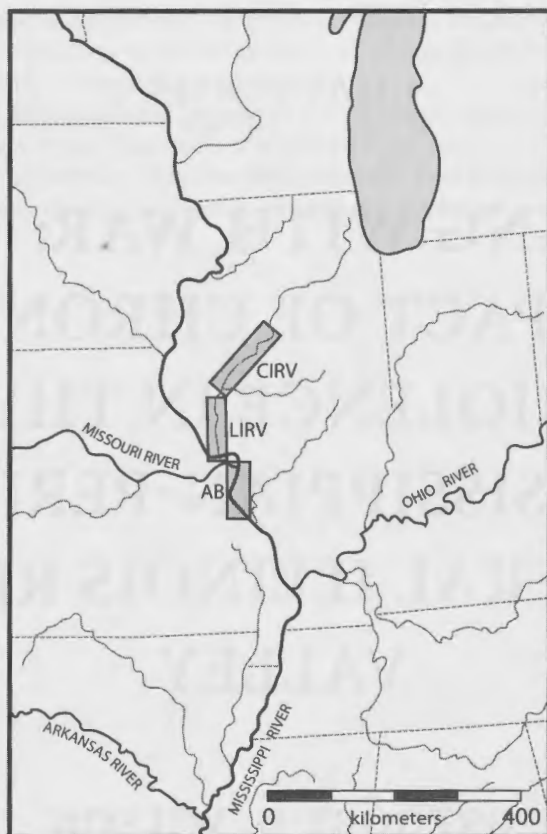
Figure 43.1 Locations of regions discussed in text: CIRV, Central Illinois River Valley;
LIRV, Lower Illinois River Valley; AB, American Bottom.

LATE WOODLAND PERIOD

The Late Woodland period was an era of intensifying hostilities across much of
eastern North America (Cobb and Garrow 1996; Little 1999; Milner 2007). Inter-
group conflict ensued from adoption of a more sedentary way of life based on plant
cultivation, associated population increases, and use of new military and hunting
technologies such as the bow and arrow (Blitz 1988; Milner 1999:122, 2007). In set-
tling into particular regional locales, Native American groups also began to forge
localized cultural identities and traditions. These changes altered the scale and in-
tensity of violence throughout much of eastern North America.

Such patterns of violence are well represented in both the lower and central
portions of the Illinois Valley. Excavation of late Woodland burial mounds in the
lower Valley has revealed cemetery groups with numerous incidences of violence-
related skeletal trauma. A number of the individuals buried in the Koster, Pete
Klunk, and Schild site mounds exhibit evidence of violent injury or death (Perino
1973a, 1973b, 1973c). Documented injuries include embedded arrow points, severed
appendages, blunt force cranial trauma, and decapitation. In some cases injured
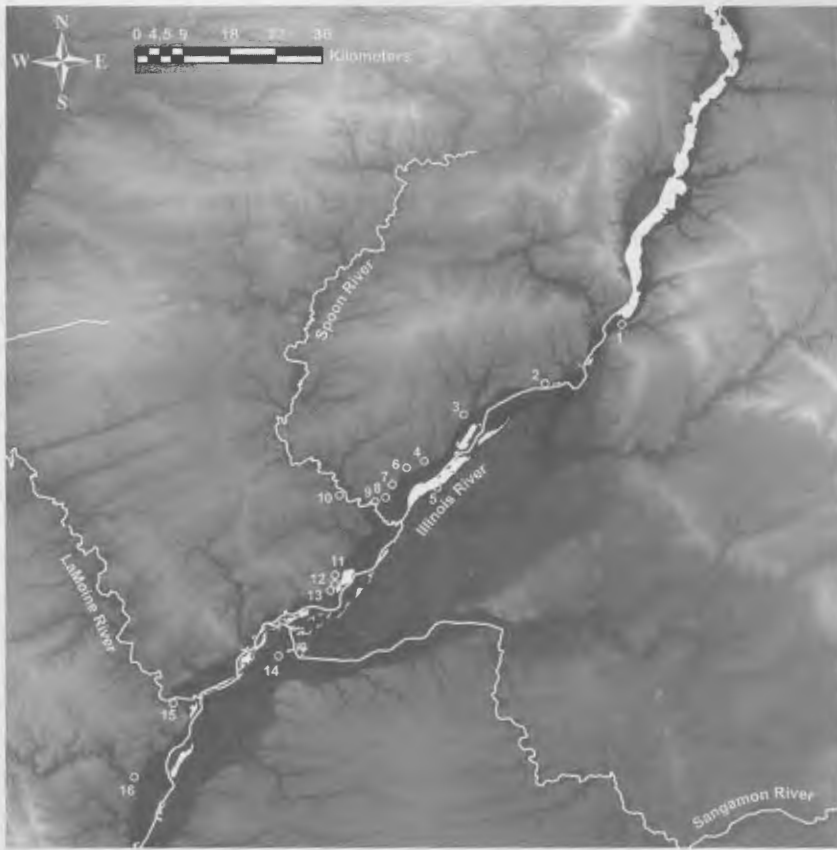
Figure 43.2 Locations of selected sites in the Central Illinois River Valley: (1) Hildemyer;
(2) Kingston Lake; (3) Orendorf; (4) Gooden; (5) Liverpool Lake; (6) C. W. Cooper;
(7) Norris Farms no. 36, Morton; (8) Dickson, Eveland, Myer Dickson; (9) Larson;
(10) Buckeye Bend; (11) Emmons; (12) Fiedler; (13) Crable; (14) Lawrenz Gun Club;
(15) Star Bridge; (16) Walsh.

individuals were buried together in groups, suggesting they died at the same time
(Perino 1973a:146). Excavation of Late Woodland burial mounds at the Gooden site
in the Central Valley has also revealed instances of violence-related skeletal trauma
in the form of graves with multiple interments and individuals with embedded
arrow points (Cole and Deuel 1937:191–198).

This osteological evidence of Late Woodland violence corresponds with the
emergence of multiple localized settlement groups in different portions of the Mis-
sissippi and Illinois valleys and the intervening uplands of west-central Illinois. In
the Central Illinois River Valley, there is evidence of two contemporaneous Late
Woodland groups, represented by the Bauer Branch phase in the southern part of
the region and the Mossville phase in the northern part of the region. These two
groups are represented primarily by small and dispersed settlements in portions of
the valley and western uplands (Esarey 2000:398; Green and Nolan 2000:362).
However, the presence of village-sized settlements on natural levees and floodplain
ridges indicates an emerging focus on the riverine environment of the CIRV (Esarey

2000:392). Antagonism or social avoidance among these groups is indicated by minimal intermixture of Mossville and Bauer Branch pottery types at representati sites (Green and Nolan 2000:368).

How did intergroup violence affect the lives of the Late Woodland occupants of the CIRV? The absence of village fortifications at this time indicates that hostilitie were intermittent rather than chronic in duration. Moreover, the presence of Late Woodland sites in a variety of upland and floodplain settings displays no obvious preference for defensive settlement locations. Considered collectively, the settle-ment and skeletal data suggest that terminal Late Woodland hostilities in the region consisted of periodic, small-scale skirmishes punctuated by occasional larger con-frontations. Dovetailing with settlement-subsistence trends of decreasing mobility such hostilities likely contributed to development of larger social aggregates with spatially circumscribed social identities.

EARLY MISSISSIPPIAN PERIOD

By AD 1050, early Mississippian groups in the American Bottom (178 river kilome ters south of the CIRV) managed to transcend the divisive tribal politics of the Woodland era to found Cahokia, the largest and most complex Native America civilization in prehistoric North America (Figure 40.1; Alt, Emerson, this volume Pauketat 2004). The emergence of political complexity in the American Bottom had a profound influence on neighboring groups. In several cases, this influence appear to have resulted from the northern movement of Cahokians into portions of the Upper Mississippi Valley, including the Central Illinois River Valley, the Apple River Valley of northwestern Illinois, the Aztalan area of southeastern Wisconsin, and the Red Wing area of Minnesota (Emerson 1991, this volume).

Small but influential groups of Cahokians appear to have emigrated to the CIRV around AD 1050. It is unclear whether the arrival of these Mississippi envoys was requested or if they relocated on their own accord, but the result was the Mississippianization of local Late Woodland groups (Conrad 1991; Harn 1991). An important aspect of the CIRV's Mississippianization was termination of Late Wood land-type hostilities in the region. Early Mississippian settlement patterns in the CIRV consist of small and widely distributed sites centered on nodal religious com-munities such as the Eveland and Kingston Lake sites, which do not appear to be fortified (Conrad 1991). From these patterns, it is tempting to conclude that a Cahokian presence in the CIRV brought an end to violence. But this was not the case. Among the Mississippian traditions that Cahokians brought with them to the CIRV was a new kind of violence involving public execution and elaborate mor-tuary ritualism. The excavation of Mound 72 at Cahokia uncovered multiple mass graves filled with executed women and men, the bodies of which were arrange so as to reference certain religious narratives (Brown 2006; Fowler et al. 1999). Amon

these executed individuals was a group of four men who had been beheaded and behanded. On the basis of isotopic analysis of bone chemistry, one surmises that at least some of these sacrificial victims were nonlocal in origin and may be raiding captives from afar (Alt 2008; Ambrose and Krigbaum 2003).

Similar mortuary interments of sacrificial victims have been identified in the CIRV at the Dickson Mounds Museum site (Conrad 1991, 1993). Bearing a striking resemblance to Mound 72 Cahokia, the Dickson Mounds Museum example consists of a burial pit with four beheaded adult men, with pots arranged in place of their heads (Conrad 1991). Thus peace in the Illinois Valley appears to have included some notable exceptions.

Such violent spectacles involving execution of nonlocal peoples likely changed the way that early Mississippian inhabitants in both the Illinois Valley and the American Bottom perceived violence and death. That is, contextualized within an emerging political and religious movement, such events may have fundamentally altered people's notions of group identity and membership, as well as their willingness to participate in increasingly ritually and politically structured violence. The religious and political integration of early Mississippian groups in the CIRV also had the potential to change the scale of violence in the region, thus setting the stage for larger-scale confrontations.

MIDDLE AND LATE MISSISSIPPIAN PERIODS

The end of the 12th century brought important changes to midcontinental North America. Native American groups throughout much of the central and upper Mississippi Valley settled into compact villages protected by wooden palisade walls (Emerson 2007:135–137; Morse and Morse 1983). The escalation of violence indicated by construction of these fortifications is further revealed by evidence that a number of these villages were burned to the ground (Morse and Morse 1983; O'Brien 2001; Price and Griffin 1979). In some cases outlying farmsteads associated with fortified villages were also burned, possibly a result of being attacked.

Understanding why violence began to escalate at this time is complicated by a multiplicity of potential causal factors. The expanding populations of sedentary agricultural societies clearly played a role in intensifying Middle Mississippian hostilities (Larson 1972; Milner 2007:196). Prime agricultural land occupied and controlled by one Mississippian group would have restricted the mobility and expansion of others. Moreover, resource scarcity would have been magnified by creation of unoccupied buffer zones between hostile populations (Anderson 1994; Hally 1993; Milner 2007:196).

On the basis of the Middle Mississippian appearance of ritual weaponry and iconographic depictions of violence, one can posit that warring also appears to have become part of a widespread system by which warrior-age men, including the ruling elite, gained status and authority (Dye 2004; Knight 1986). This male-oriented

aggrandizement strategy may have helped counterbalance the increasing power of female-oriented institutions of authority based on control of food production.

Middle Mississippian warfare appears to have been particularly intense in the CIRV in comparison to the American Bottom region to the south, where more highly populated and complexly organized settlements served to deter potential raiding parties (Wilson and Steadman 2007). Around AD 1200, the early Mississippian settlement pattern of dispersed communities was replaced by fortified and nucleated towns linked with smaller outlying settlements. Orendorf is the earliest and best-understood fortified village in the CIRV. The Middle Mississippian occupation of the site consisted of four sequentially rebuilt towns; at least three stages were protected by wooden palisade walls with regularly spaced bastions. Orendorf's final occupation, settlement D, consisted of a 5 hectare palisaded settlement with an estimated population of 400 to 500 inhabitants (Conrad 1991:133). Settlement D underwent two episodes of village expansion; each time the palisade wall was also expanded and rebuilt. This trend toward population amalgamation was likely inspired by intensifying hostilities in the region. Around AD 1250, the Orendorf site was the target of a large-scale direct assault resulting in complete incineration of the village. The presence of in situ whole artifacts on the floor of many of these burned structures suggests that village occupants had little time to evacuate before their homes were destroyed.

Successful assault on a fortified Mississippian settlement like Orendorf would have been no small feat for a war party. Orendorf's wooden palisade would have presented a major obstacle. Attackers would have been extremely vulnerable to projectile assault once they entered the 40–50 meter killing radius of an archer-manned bastion (see Keeley et al. 2007:70; Lafferty 1973). Scaling this wall while dodging arrow fire would have been equally precarious. Alternatively, with only stone celts as woodworking tools it would have been very difficult to dismantle portions of the wall to gain entrance (see Keener 1999 for discussion of Native American military tactics used against palisade walls). Even after Orendorf's defenses were breached, attackers would still have to confront the town's occupants in direct combat.

Estimating the size of the offensive force necessary to conquer a village like Orendorf is complicated, but a common military science ratio offered for such a scenario is three attackers to one defender.[1] If approximately half of Orendorf's estimated population of 400 were fit for combat, then a successful offensive on the community would have consisted of a minimum of 600 attackers. If only a quarter of Orendorf's occupants were combat ready, then perhaps as few as 300 attackers may have been sufficient to take the village. Two important insights derive from these estimations. First, an effective assault force would have had to be drawn from several Orendorf-sized settlements. Secondly, in a direct assault scenario there would have been the potential for the attacking group to suffer heavy casualties (Keeley et al. 2007; Milner 2007:188). Collectively these two factors indicate that a military campaign capable of successfully assaulting a fortified Mississippian village such as Orendorf would have required multivillage-level planning and a readiness to endure significant causalities.

The violent incineration of Orendorf was not the last large-scale attack of its kind in the CIRV. Archaeologists have determined that Middle Mississippian village sites such as Buckeye Bend and Star Bridge were also attacked and burned to the ground, judging from the presence of hundreds of burned buildings visible as blackened rectangular surface stains in modern agricultural fields (Conrad 1991). Surface survey and small-scale excavations have also identified extensive burning at other Middle Mississippian villages in the region (Conrad 1991; Morse et al. 1953).

Analysis of human skeletal remains yields another important line of information by which to assess the scale and intensity of hostilities in the CIRV at this time. Steadman's recent analysis of the Orendorf site skeletal population (2008) has revealed an adult trauma rate higher than reported for any other Mississippian site in the southeastern United States. Violence-related mortuary patterns include a mass grave with at least 15 interments and numerous other individuals with embedded arrow points, scalp marks, and blunt force cranial trauma.

The Crable phase marks the final chapter in the late Prehistory of the CIRV (Conrad 1991; Esarey and Conrad 1998). This era commenced around AD 1300, when an Oneota group known archaeologically as the Bold Counselor phase entered the CIRV from the northern midcontinent. It is unclear whether this emigration was intrusive or involved some kind of alliance of Oneota and local Mississippian groups.

There are several indications that intergroup violence may have been in flux at this time. First, there are important changes in distribution of settlements in the region; much of the regional populace appears to have consolidated into and around five primary villages along a 33 kilometer stretch of the western bluff of the Illinois Valley (Esarey and Conrad 1998). Very few sites dating to this period have been identified outside running distance of these main villages. The presence of incinerated domestic structures with intact floor assemblages at the Morton Village and Crable sites indicates these communities may have been subject to periodic attacks. The dense and well-defined middens at Crable phase sites (Esarey and Conrad 1998), however, indicate that some of these villages had longer occupation spans than earlier villages such as Buckeye Bend, Orendorf, and Star Bridges. The relative longevity of some villages after AD 1300 suggests that the large-scale assaults of the 1200s were less frequent, or at least less devastating. Perhaps the multivillage alliances that facilitated large attacks no longer existed. It is also possible that the objectives of violence shifted away from attacking fortified villages and toward ambushing individuals and small groups in the rural countryside.

The skeletal record also suggests that intergroup hostilities in the CIRV were changing throughout the 13th and 14th centuries. These changes are made visible through a brief comparison of the 13th century Mississippian cemetery at the Orendorf site and the early-14th Oneota cemetery at the Norris Farms number 36 site. Although the injuries displayed by victims of violence at Norris Farms number 36 are similar to those of earlier Middle Mississippian victims at the Orendorf site (Milner et al. 1991; Steadman 2008), there are indications that the violent confrontations involving the Norris Farms Oneota population were smaller in scale than those

endured by the Orendorf Middle Mississippian population. For example, the Norris Farm number 36 cemetery lacks evidence of a mass grave such as the one from Orendorf (Steadman 2008). Milner et al. (1991) have also argued that many of the Norris Farms number 36 victims were killed in remote locations, while alone or in small groups, and were later found and brought back to their home village for burial (see also Santure et al. 1990). He bases this argument on the presence of individuals represented by varying levels of skeletal completeness, the prevalence of scavenger damage, and patterns of postmortem mutilation, all of which suggest that some time passed between an individual's death and burial (Milner et al. 1991). Lack of similar evidence at the Orendorf site is consistent with other indications that larger-scale assaults were more frequent in the 13th century than in 14th century CIRV.

How did the chronic violence of the 13th and 14th centuries have an impact on the lives of the regional inhabitants of the CIRV? On the basis of the frequency of skeletal lesions such as cribra orbitalia and porotic hyperostosis, Milner et al. (1991) have suggested that the threat of attack compromised the subsistence practices of the 13th century occupants of the Morton Village. In other words, it was no longer safe to leave the protective walls of the village to hunt, fish, gather, and farm.

Perhaps the most archaeologically visible change was the nucleation of regional inhabitants into compact, fortified villages. In addition to altering patterns of regional mobility and health, this move also entailed a steady increase in village size. For example, the early-13th-century Mississippian village at the Orendorf site was expanded twice, to ultimately cover 5 hectares. Larger fortified villages such as the 8 hectare Larson site were established later in the 13th century. This trend toward larger settlements was likely inspired by escalating violence in the region. As hostilities intensified, it became riskier to live outside the protective walls of a fortified village. Larger villages would have increased the number of potential attackers and defenders available to particular social groups.

Other important changes in community organization also took place as residential groups relocated within the spatial confines of fortified villages. Earthen monuments, ceremonial buildings, plazas, and other specialized ceremonial facilities once positioned at nodal communities were now closely juxtaposed with ordinary houses, storage pits, and other domestic features. These changes may have entailed more direct incorporation of certain ritual practices into everyday life, as now many ordinary domestic routines would have literally and figuratively been carried out in the shadow of mounds, ceremonial buildings, and other sacred spaces.

Over the long run, intergroup violence also appears to have influenced development of political complexity in the region. As Cahokia fragmented to the south in the late 13th century, there was an increase in the size and number of Mississippian settlements in the CIRV, especially in the vicinity of the confluence of the Spoon and Illinois Rivers. It was during this era that the Larson site mound and village were built, along with other nearby villages and farmsteads. This was also the period when much of the mound construction took place at the Dickson Mounds mortuary complex (Harn 1980:76). This Mississippian florescence, however, appears to

have been cut short by intensification of hostilities in the region. The number of catastrophically burned and abandoned villages dating to the 13th century is grim testament to the scale and intensity of warfare during this era. The chaotic aftermath of these village assaults, large-scale population displacements, and loss of life appears to have substantially narrowed the opportunities for political aggrandizement in the region.

Exactly who the allies and enemy combatants were in these hostilities is unclear. By 1450, however, Native American groups had largely abandoned the Central Illinois River Valley as well as the American Bottom and the Ohio-Mississippi confluence area to the south (Cobb and Butler 2002). The ultimate fate of these people whose lives were so profoundly affected by violence is unknown.

NOTE

1. This estimate assumes that both attackers and defenders had similar weaponry.

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