Chiefdoms, Collapse, and Coalescence in the Early American South

This book provides a new conceptual framework for understanding how the Indian nations of the early American South emerged from the ruins of a precolonial, Mississippian world. A broad regional synthesis that ranges over much of the Eastern Woodlands, its focus is on the Indians of the Carolina Piedmont – the Catawbas and their neighbors – from 1400 to 1725. Using an "eventful" approach to social change, Robin Beck argues that the collapse of the Mississippian world was fundamentally a transformation of political economy, from one built on maize to one of guns, slaves, and hides. The story takes us from first encounters through the rise of the Indian slave trade and the scourge of disease to the wars that shook the American South in the early 1700s. Yet the book's focus remains on the Catawbas, drawing on their experiences in a violent, unstable landscape to develop a comparative perspective on structural continuity and change.

Robin Beck is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Assistant Curator of North American Archaeology, Museum of Anthropology, at the University of Michigan. He is editor of *The Durable House: House Society Models in Archaeology* (2007). His articles have appeared in the journals *Current Anthropology*, *American Antiquity*, *Ethnohistory*, *Latin American Antiquity*, *Southeastern Archaeology*, and *Native South*. Beck has conducted archaeological fieldwork in much of the eastern United States, as well as in Bolivia, Peru, and western China.

Chiefdoms, Collapse, and Coalescence in the Early American South

ROBIN BECK
University of Michigan

FOREWORD BY
CHARLES M. HUDSON
Franklin Professor of Anthropology and History Emeritus, University of Georgia

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107022133

First published 2013

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Beck, Robin, 1969–
Chiefdoms, collapse, and coalescence in the early American south / Robin Beck.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-02213-3 (hardback)
1. Mississippian culture – South Carolina – Piedmont. 2. Chiefdoms – South Carolina – Piedmont. 3. Catawba Indians – South Carolina – Piedmont – Kings and rulers.
4. Catawba Indians – South Carolina – Piedmont – Politics and government.
5. Catawba Indians – South Carolina – Piedmont – Social conditions. I. Title.
E99.M6815B435 2013
975.7′2501–dc23 2012039750

ISBN 978-1-107-02213-3 Hardback

Contents

List of Maps

List of Figures

List of Tables

Foreword

Charles M. Hudson

Every once in a while a book like this one comes along that makes you take stock of what you know and have known. More than 40 years ago, in 1970, I published *The Catawba Nation*, a revised version of my 1965 PhD dissertation. When I compare my book on the Catawbas with Robin Beck's excellent new treatment of the same subject, my earlier work can be seen not only as out of date but also as a quaint relic of the past. It is worthwhile thinking about what has made it so.

Several things have changed since 1970. First, the quantity and quality of well-dated archaeological information on the entire southeastern United States have been increased many times over, such that very large geopolitical questions can now be asked and answered on the basis of this information. Second, we now have a much more accurate geographical grasp of the travels and activities of the Spanish explorers of the Southeast in the sixteenth century. Both ethnohistorians and archaeologists are now working to combine this early historical information with archaeological evidence to reconstruct the social, political, and economic structure of the native Southeast. And most importantly, ethnohistorians and archaeologists are asking questions about what kinds of changes occurred in the Southeast that link the native peoples of the sixteenth century to those of the early eighteenth century.

A consensus is emerging that in the precolonial Southeast a Mississippian world existed, a world of horticultural chiefdoms that stretched from the Atlantic Coast to the edge of the Plains in the West, and from the Gulf Coast northward to Wisconsin. It was a world comprising many different languages and very many polities living under an overarching Mississippian umbrella. How did this world emerge over the course of

several centuries, how was it organized, and how did it collapse with the coming of the Europeans? And how, from the social wreckage of this shatter zone, as Robbie Ethridge terms the setting of this vast social transformation, did the eighteenth-century Southeastern Indians emerge?

Robin Beck has made an excellent and timely contribution to the body of research and writing that is now emerging to give an adequate account of the rise and fall of the Mississippian world. Especially important in this book is the significant progress he makes in developing a language with which to talk about the polities, relationships, and economic principles of these two centuries of radical transformation. Most important of all, he begins here to enunciate a theory to explain how this fundamental reordering of the social landscape of the early South came about. Clearly, the scholarship in this field is being raised to a new level. As we can see in Robin Beck's work, the coming decades of collaboration and debate among scholars of the Native South will be exciting ones.

Acknowledgments

The writing of this book has taken more than four years, from early 2008 through the summer of 2012, though my fascination with its central subject – the archaeology and early colonial history of what is now the Carolina Piedmont – spans a much longer period of time, much of my life, in fact. And although mine is the only name on its cover, many others have helped me see it through to completion.

I was an impressionable teenager when I met my first real archaeologist, David Moore, just before he was to begin his dissertation fieldwork at the Berry site. It is my good fortune that Dave and I have gone on to become close friends and have now been working together in the upper Catawba Valley for nearly 20 years. Dave's passion for archaeology, and especially for sharing what we learn with the communities where we work, inspired me then and still inspires me today. I was never formally a student of Charles Hudson, yet so much of what follows is a testament to his influence, academic and otherwise. From his support of my graduate school applications to his suggestions for improving multiple drafts of this book, not to mention the Foreword he contributed to it, I cannot thank Charlie enough for his belief in me through the years.

Jim Knight at the University of Alabama guided me through my MA thesis, which in many ways held the seeds for this project. Rather than direct me into his own research at Moundville, he encouraged me to follow my own interests in the Catawba Valley, a generosity for which I am immensely grateful. Although my dissertation research at Northwestern University took me far afield from the Catawba, to Bolivia's Lake Titicaca Basin, this book is very much a product of my Northwestern experience.

Tim Earle's broad knowledge and open mind proved essential as I began to develop my own perspectives on chiefdoms. Jim Brown, chair of my PhD committee, has had a more profound influence on my development as an anthropologist than any other person. I could not have written this book without his intellectual guidance and friendship.

I began this project at the University of Oklahoma and completed it at the University of Michigan. At Oklahoma, Pat Gilman and Paul Minnis created a warm, collegial environment that placed a priority on nurturing junior faculty. At Michigan, Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery have been unflagging sources of encouragement through much of this project. Joyce, in particular, read multiple drafts of the book and offered invaluable suggestions for its improvement. I am in their debt. I am also grateful to Carla Sinopoli for putting me in touch with Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press. I would like to thank my two readers, David Anderson and Robbie Ethridge, whose advocacy motivated me through many long nights of additional writing and revision. Robbie was one of the first people with whom I discussed my conception of this project, and she read the entire manuscript twice. Her long conversations, detailed comments, and careful critiques have made this a better book than it would otherwise have been.

By listening, discussing, and debating, many other friends and colleagues have made significant contributions as well: Mark Williams, David Hally, Vin Steponaitis, Steve Davis, Brett Riggs, Charles Ewen, Alan May, Chester DePratter, Stan South, John Worth, Maureen Meyers, Ian Brown, Dick Krause, Duke Beasley, Marvin Smith, Patrick Livingood, Chris Rodning, and Doug Bolender. I am especially grateful to Chris and Doug. Chris and I have been directing archaeology at the Berry site (with Dave Moore) for more than a decade now. He is a wonderful colleague and friend. Doug and I entered Northwestern University from remarkably different backgrounds and with archaeological interests that seemed, superficially, to be just as remarkably different. Instead, our paths converged in ways that neither of us could have expected, and our many hours spent talking concepts and theory have deeply influenced the shape of this book.

At Cambridge University Press, my editor Beatrice Rehl championed this book from our first conversation about a half-completed manuscript through the final stages of its completion. Her editorial staff, Asya Graf and Isabella Vitti, have made the production process as smooth and painless as possible.

For as long as I can remember, my mother and late father, Martha and Robin Beck, encouraged my childhood dreams of becoming an archaeologist. Their example guides me as I raise my own children now. I would like to acknowledge my brother Kevin Beck, my sister Amy Trinkle, and *mi amigo* Gray Winkler. My mother-in-law, Fidelina Batista, has been a true source of support, as have my brother-in-law, Cadir Lee, and my father-in-law, Robert Lee. I would also like to thank the Berry family, particularly Pat and James, for their stewardship of the Berry site. Pat, my aunt, died suddenly just before this book was finished – I will miss her enthusiasm, her curiosity, and her great heart.

My daughter Soledad and her little brother Cadir are my joy. My wife Laoma is my partner, my best friend, and the love of my life. She has read every line of every paragraph or listened as I read them aloud. I am thankful for her insights and critiques, for her patience, and for her uncanny ability – which she wielded like a superpower at just the right times – to articulate what I was trying to say before I even knew myself. Laoma still thinks it was bold that I included her in the acknowledgments of my dissertation, when we had only been dating for three months. But I knew then what time has only proved: she is the best thing that ever happened to me. This book is for her.